Mullins

BIRDS OF PREY

A Novel

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET"

ETC. ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

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Book the Third.

HEAPING UP RICHES.

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CHAPTER VI.

THE COMPACT OF GRAY'S INN.

The sands which ran so swiftly in the glass which that bright young urchin Love had wrested from the hand of grim old Time ran with an almost equal swiftness in the hour-glasses of lodging-house keepers and tradespeople, and the necessities of every day demanded perpetual exertion on the part of Mr. Hawkehurst, let Charlotte's eyes be never so bright, and Charlotte's society never so dear. For Captain Paget and his protégé there was no such thing as rest; and the ingenious Captain took care that the greater part of the labour should be performed by Valentine, while the lion's share of the spoil was pounced upon by the ready paw of the noble Horatio. Just now

he found his pupil unusually plastic, unusually careless of his own interests, and ready to serve his master with agreeable blindness.

Since that awkward little affair at Forêtde-chêne, that tiresome entanglement about a King of Spades which had put in an appearance at a moment when no such monarch was to be expected, Captain Paget had obtained the means of existence in a manner which was almost respectable, if not altogether honest; for it is not to be supposed that honesty and respectability are by any means synonymous terms. It was only by the exercise of superhuman address that the Captain had extricated himself from that perplexing predicament at the Belgian watering-place; and it may be that the unpleasant experiences of that particular evening were not without a salutary effect upon the adventurer's future plans.

"It was touch-and-go work, Val," he said to his companion; "and if I hadn't carried matters with a high hand, and sprung my position as an officer in the English service upon those French ruffians, I don't know where it would have ended."

"It might have come to a metallic ornamentation of the ankle, and some amiable 444, who has murdered his grandmother with a red-hot poker and extenuating circumstances, for your companion," murmured Valentine. "I wouldn't try it on with that supererogatory king again on this side of the Channel, if I were you."

The Captain bestowed a freezing look on his flippant protégé, and then commenced a very grave discussion of future ways and means, which ended in an immediate departure for Paris, where the two men entered upon an unpretentious career in the commercial line as agents and travellers for the patentees of an improved kind of gutta percha, which material was supposed to be applicable to every imaginable purpose, from the sole of an infant's boot to the roof of a cathedral. There are times when genius must stoop to pick up its daily pittance; and for twelve months the elegant Horatio Paget was content to devote his best energies to the perpetual praise of the Incorrodible and Indestructible and Incombustible India-rubber, in consideration of a very modest percentage on his

commercial transactions in that material. To exert the persuasive eloquence of a Burke or a Thurlow in order to induce a man to roof his new warehouses with a fabric which you are aware will be torn into ribbons by the first run of stormy weather, for the sake of obtaining two-and-a-half per cent on his investment, may not be in accordance with the honourable notions of a Bayard, and yet in a commercial sense may be strictly correct. It was only when Captain Paget had made a comfortable little purse out of his percentage upon the Incorrodible and Incombustible that he discovered the extreme degradation of his position as agent and traveller. He determined on returning to the land of his birth. Joint-stock companies were beginning to multiply in the commercial world at this period; and wherever there are many schemes for the investment of public capital there is room for such a man as Horatio Paget; a man who, with the aid of a hired brougham, can inspire confidence in the breast of the least daring speculator.

The Captain came, accompanied as usual by

that plastic tool and subaltern, Valentine Hawkehurst, who, being afflicted with a chronic weariness of everything in life, was always eager to abandon any present pursuit in favour of the vaguest contingency, and to shake off the dust of any given locality from his vagabond feet. Captain Paget and his protégé came to London, where a fortunate combination of circumstances threw them in the way of Mr. Sheldon.

The alliance which arose between that gentleman and the Captain opened a fair prospect for the latter. Mr. Sheldon was interested in the formation of a certain joint-stock company, but had his own reasons for not wishing to be identified with it. A stalking-horse is by no means a difficult kind of animal to procure in the cattle-fairs of London; but a stalking-horse whose paces are sufficiently showy and imposing—a high-stepper, of thoroughbred appearance, and a mouth sensitively alive to the lightest touch of the curb, easy to ride or drive, warranted neither a kicker nor a bolter—is a quadruped of rare excellence not to be met with every day. Just such a stalking-

horse was Captain Paget; and Mr. Sheldon lost no time in putting him into action. It is scarcely necessary to say that the stockbroker trusted his new acquaintance only so far as it was absolutely necessary to trust him; or that the Captain and the stockbroker thoroughly understood each other without affecting to do so. For Horatio Paget the sun of prosperity arose in unaccustomed splendour. He was able to pay for his lodgings, and was an eminently respectable person in the eyes of his landlord. He enjoyed the daily use of a neatly-appointed brougham, in which only the most practised eye could discover the taint of the livery stable. He dined sumptuously at fashionable restaurants, and wore the freshest of lavender gloves, the most delicate of waxen heath-blossoms or creamy-tinted exotics in the button-hole of his faultless coat.

While the chief flourished, the subaltern was comparatively idle. The patrician appearance and manners of the Captain were a perennial source of profit to that gentleman; but Valentine Hawkehurst had not a patrician appearance; and the

work which Mr. Sheldon found for him was of a more uncertain and less profitable character than that which fell to the share of the elegant Horatio. But Valentine was content. He shared the Captain's lodging, though he did not partake of the Captain's dinners or ride in the smart little brougham. He had a roof to shelter him, and was rarely unprovided with the price of some kind of dinner; and as this was the highest order of prosperity he had ever known, he was content. He was more than content; for the first time in his existence he knew what it was to be happy. A purer joy than life had ever held for him until now made him careless whether his dinner cost eighteen pence or eighteen shillings; whether he rode in the most perfect of broughams or walked in the mud. He took no heed for the future; he forgot the past, and abandoned himself heart and soul to the new delights of the present.

Never had Philip Sheldon found so willing a tool, so cheap a drudge. Valentine was ready to do anything or everything for Charlotte's stepfather, since his relations with that gentleman

enabled him to spend so much of his life with Charlotte.

But even in this sublimated state of mind Mr. Hawkehurst was not exempt from the great necessity of Mr. Skimpole and humanity at large. He wanted pounds. His garments were shabby, and he desired new and elegant raiment in which to appear to advantage before the eyes of the woman he loved. It had been his privilege on several occasions to escort Mrs. Sheldon and the two younger ladies to a theatre; and even this privilege had cost him money. He wanted pounds to expend upon those new books and music which served so often as the excuse for a visit to the Lawn. He wanted pounds for very trivial purposes; but he wanted them desperately. A lover without pounds is the most helpless and contemptible of mankind; he is a knight-errant without his armour, a troubadour without his lute.

In his dilemma Mr. Hawkehurst resorted to that simple method which civilisation has devised for the relief of pecuniary difficulties of a temporary nature. He had met George Sheldon several

times at the Lawn, and had become tolerably intimate with that gentleman, whom he now knew to be "the Sheldon of Gray's Inn," and the ally and agent of certain bill-discounters. To George he went one morning; and after requesting that Captain Paget should know nothing of his application, explained his requirements. It was a very small sum which he asked for, modestly conscious that the security he had to offer was of the weakest. He only wanted thirty pounds, and was willing to give a bill at two months for five-and-thirty.

There was a good deal of hesitation on the part of the lawyer; but Valentine had expected to meet with some difficulty, and was not altogether unprepared for a point-blank refusal. He was agreeably surprised when George Sheldon told him he would manage "that little matter; only the bill must be for forty." But in proof of the liberal spirit in which Mr. Hawkehurst was to be treated, the friendly lawyer informed him that the two months should be extended to three.

Valentine did not stop to consider that by this friendly process he was to pay at the rate of some-

thing over a hundred and thirty per cent per annum for the use of the money he wanted. He knew that this was his only chance of getting money; so he shut his eyes to the expensive nature of the transaction, and thanked Mr. Sheldon for the accommodation granted to him.

"And now we've settled that little business, I should like to have a few minutes' private chat with you," said George, "on the understanding that what passes between you and me is strictly confidential."

"Of course!"

"You seem to have been leading rather an idle life for the last few months; and it strikes me, Mr. Hawkehurst, you're too clever a fellow to care about that sort of thing."

"Well, I have been in some measure wasting my sweetness on the desert air," Valentine answered carelessly. "The governor seems to have slipped into a good berth by your brother's agency; but I am not Horatio Nugent Cromie Paget, and the brougham and lavender kids of the Promoter are not for me."

"There is money to be picked up by better dodges than promoting," replied the attorney ambiguously; "but I suppose you wouldn't care for anything that didn't bring immediate cash? You wouldn't care to speculate the chances, however well the business might promise?"

"*C'est selon!* That's as may be," answered Valentine coolly. "You see those affairs that promise so much are apt to fail when it comes to a question of performance. I'm not a capitalist; I can't afford to become a speculator. I've been living from hand to mouth lately by means of occasional contributions to a sporting weekly, and a little bit of business which your brother threw in my way. I've been able to be tolerably useful to him, and he promises to get me something in the way of a clerkship, foreign correspondence, and that kind of thing."

"Humph!" muttered George Sheldon; "that means eighty pounds a year and fourteen hours' work a day, letters that must be answered by this mail, and so on. I don't think that kind of drudgery would ever suit you, Hawkehurst.

You've not served the right apprenticeship for that sort of thing; you ought to try for some higher game. What should you say to an affair that might put two or three thousand pounds in your pocket if it was successful?"

"I should feel very much inclined to fancy it a bubble; one of those dazzling rainbow-tinted globes which look so bright dancing about in the sunshine, and explode into nothing directly they encounter any tangible substance. However, my dear Sheldon, if you really have any employment to offer to a versatile young man who is not overburdened with vulgar prejudices, you'd better put the business in plain words."

"I will," answered George; "but it's not an affair that can be discussed in five minutes. It's rather a serious matter, and involves a good deal of consideration. I know that you're a man of the world, and a very clever fellow into the bargain; but there's something more than that wanted for this business, and that is patience. The hare is a very fine animal in her way, you know; but a man must have a little of the tortoise

in him if he wants to achieve anything out of the common run in the way of good luck. I have been working, and waiting, and speculating the chances for the last fifteen years, and I think I've got a good chance at last. But there's a good deal of work to be done before the business is finished; and I find that I must have someone to help me."

"What sort of business is it?"

"The search for the heir-at-law of a man who has died intestate within the last ten years."

The two men looked at each other at this juncture; and Valentine Hawkehurst smiled significantly.

"Within the last ten years?" he said. "That's rather a wide margin."

"Do you think you would be a good hand at hunting up the missing links in the chain of a family history?" asked Mr. Sheldon. "It's rather tiresome work, you know, and requires no common amount of patience and perseverance."

"I can persevere," said Valentine decisively, "if you can show me that it will be worth my while to do so. You want an heir-at-law, and

I'm to look for him. What am I to get while I'm looking for him? and what is to be my reward if I find him?"

"I'll give you a pound a week and your travelling expenses while you're employed in the search; and I'll give you three thousand pounds on the day the heir gets his rights."

"Humph!" muttered Mr. Hawkehurst rather doubtfully; "three thousand pounds is a very respectable haul. But then, you see, I may fail to discover the heir; and even if I do find him the chances are ten to one that the business would be thrown into Chancery at the last moment; in which case I might wait till doomsday for the reward of my labours."

George Sheldon shrugged his shoulders impatiently. He had expected this penniless adventurer to catch eagerly at the chance he offered.

"Three thousand pounds are not to be picked up in the streets," he said. "If you don't care to work with me, I can find plenty of clever fellows in London who'll jump at the business."

"And you want me to begin work—?"

"Immediately."

"And how am I to pay forty pounds in three months out of a pound a week?"

"Never mind the bill," said Mr. Sheldon, with lofty generosity. "If you work heart and soul for me, I'll square that little matter for you; I'll get it renewed for another three months."

"In that case I'm your man. I don't mind a little hard work just now, and I can live upon a pound a week where another man would starve. So now for my instructions."

There was a brief pause, during which the lawyer refreshed himself by walking up and down his office two or three times with his hands in his pockets. After which relief he seated himself before his desk, took out a sheet of foolscap, and selected a pen from the inkstand.

"It's just as well to put things in a thoroughly business-like manner," he said presently. "I suppose you'd have no objection to signing a memorandum of agreement—nothing that would be of any use in a court of law, you know, but a simple understanding between man and man, for

our own satisfaction, as a safeguard against all possibility of misunderstanding in the future. I've every reason to consider you the most honourable of men, you know; but honourable men turn round upon each other sometimes. You might ask me for something more than three thou'—if you succeeded in your search."

"Precisely; or I might make terms with the heir-at-law, and throw you over. Perhaps that was your idea."

"Not exactly. The first half of the chain is in my hands, and the second half will be worth nothing without it. But to prevent all unpleasantness we may as well put our intentions upon record."

"I've not the least objection," replied Valentine with supreme indifference. "Draw up whatever memorandum you please, and I'll sign it. If you don't mind smoke, I should like to console myself with a cigar while you draw the bond."

The question was a polite formula, the atmosphere of George Sheldon's office being redolent of stale tobacco.

"Smoke away," said the lawyer; "and if you

can drink brandy-and-soda at this time of day, you'll find the *de quoi* in that cupboard. Make yourself at home."

Mr. Hawkehurst declined the brandy-and-soda, and regaled himself only with a cigar, which he took from his own case. He sat in one of the second-floor windows smoking, and looking dreamily into the gardens, while George Sheldon drew up the agreement. He was thinking that any hazard which took him away from London and Charlotte Halliday might be a fortunate one.

The lawyer finished his document, which he read aloud for the benefit of the gentleman who was to sign it. The agreement was in the following terms:

"Memorandum of agreement between George Sheldon on the one part, and Valentine Hawkehurst on the other part, whereby it is this day mutually agreed by and between the parties hereto as follows:

"1. That, in consideration of a weekly salary of one pound while in pursuit of certain inquiries, and of the sum of three thousand pounds to be

paid upon the arising of a certain event, namely, the establishment of an heir-at-law to the estates of the late John Haygarth, the said Valentine Hawkehurst shall act as agent for the said George Sheldon, and shall not at any time during the continuance of this agreement do any act to prejudice the inquiry or the steps now being taken by the said George Sheldon to discover and establish an heir-at-law to the estates of the late John Haygarth.

"2. That at no time hereafter shall the said Valentine Hawkehurst be entitled to a larger recompense than is hereinbefore provided: nor shall he be liable to the said George Sheldon for the return of any moneys which the said George Sheldon may advance on account of the said inquiries in the event of the same not resulting in the establishment of an heir to the estates of the late John Haygarth.

"3. That the said Valentine Hawkehurst shall not alter his character of agent to the said George Sheldon during the prosecution of the said inquiry: that he shall deliver over to the said George Shel-

don all documents and other forms of evidence that may arise from his, the said Valentine Hawkehurst's, inquiries: and that he shall week by week, and every week, and as often as may be necessary, report to the said George Sheldon the result of such inquiries, and that he shall not on any pretence whatever be at liberty to withhold such fruits of his researches, nor discover the same to anyone else than the said George Sheldon, under a penalty of ten thousand pounds, to be recovered as liquidated damages previously agreed between the parties as the measure of damages payable to the said George Sheldon upon the breach of this agreement by the said Valentine Hawkehurst.

"In witness whereof the parties hereto have this 20th day of September 1862 set their hands and affixed their seals."

"That sounds stiff enough to hold water in a court of law," said Valentine, when George Sheldon had recited the contents of the document.

"I don't suppose it would be much good in Chancery-lane," returned the lawyer carelessly;

"though I daresay it sounds rather formidable to you. When one gets the trick of the legal jargon, it's not easy to draw the simplest form of agreement without a few superfluous words. I may as well call in my clerk to witness our signatures, I suppose."

"Call in anyone you like."

The clerk was summoned from a sunless and airless den at the back of his principal's office. The two men appended their signatures to the document; the clerk added his in witness of the genuine nature of those signatures. It was an affair of two minutes. The clerk was dismissed. Mr. Sheldon blotted and folded the memorandum, and laid it aside in one of the drawers of his desk.

"Come," he said cheerily, "that's a business-like beginning at any rate. And now you'd better have some brandy-and-soda, for what I've got to say will take some time in the saying of it."

On this occasion Mr. Hawkehurst accepted the lawyer's hospitality, and there was some little delay before the conversation proceeded.

It was a very long conversation. Mr. Sheldon

produced a bundle of papers, and exhibited some of them to his agent, beginning with that advertisement in the *Times* which had first attracted his notice, but taking very good care *not* to show his coadjutor the obituary in the *Observer* wherein the amount of the intestate's fortune was stated. The ready wits which had been sharpened at so many different grindstones proved keen enough for the occasion. Valentine Hawkehurst had had little to do with genealogies or baptismal registers during his past career; but his experiences were of such a manifold nature that he was not easily to be baffled or mystified by any new experience. He showed himself almost as quick at tracing up the intricacies of a family tree as Mr. Sheldon, the astute attorney and practised genealogist.

"I have traced these Haygarths back to the intestate's great-grandfather, who was a carpenter and a Puritan in the reign of Charles the First. He seems to have made money—how, I have not been able to discover with any certainty; but it is more than probable he served in the civil wars, and came in for some of the plunder those crop-

eared, psalm-singing, Pierce-the-brain-of-the-tyrant-with-the-nail-of-Jael scoundrels were always in the way of, at the sack of Royalist mansions. The man made money; and his son, the grandfather of the intestate, was a wealthy citizen in the reigns of Anne and the first George. He was a grocer, and lived in the market-place of Ullerton in Leicestershire; an out-of-the-way sleepy place it is now, but was prosperous enough in those days, I daresay. This man (the grandfather) began the world well-off, and amassed a large fortune before he had done with it. The lucky beggar lived in the days when free-trade and competition were unknown, when tea was something like sixty shillings a pound, and when a psalm-singing sleek-haired fellow, with a reputation for wealth and honesty might cheat his customers to his heart's content. He had one son, Matthew, who seems, from what I can gather, to have been a wild sort of fellow in the early part of his career, and not to have been at any time on the best possible terms with the sanctimonious dad. This Matthew married at fifty-

three years of age, and died a year after his marriage, leaving one son, who afterwards became the reverend intestate, with whom, according to the evidence at present before me, ends the direct line of the Haygarths." The lawyer paused, turned over two or three papers, and then resumed his explanation. "The sanctimonious grocer, Jonathan Haygarth, had one other child besides the son—a daughter called Ruth, who married a certain Peter Judson, and became the mother of a string of sons and daughters; and it is amongst the descendants of these Judsons that we may have to look for our heir-at-law, unless we find him nearer home. Now my idea is, that we *shall* find him nearer home."

"What reason have you for forming that idea?" asked Valentine.

"I will tell you. This Matthew Haygarth is known to have been a wild fellow. I obtained a good deal of fragmentary information about him from an old man in some almshouses at Ullerton, whose grandfather was a schoolfellow of Matthew's. He was a scapegrace, and was

always spending money in London while the respectable psalm-singer was hoarding it in Ullerton. There used to be desperate quarrels between the two men, and towards the end of Jonathan Haygarth's life the old man made half-a-dozen different wills in favour of half-a-dozen different people, and cutting off scapegrace Matthew with a shilling. Fortunately for scapegrace Matthew, the old man had a habit of quarrelling with his dearest friends,—a fashion not quite exploded in this enlightened nineteenth century, — and the wills were burnt one after another, until the worthy Jonathan became as helpless and foolish as his great contemporary and namesake, the Dean of St. Patrick's; and after having died 'first at top,' did his son the favour to die altogether, *intestate*, whereby the roisterer and spendthrift of Soho and Covent-garden came into a very handsome fortune. The old man died in 1766, aged eighty; a very fine specimen of your good old English tradesman of the Puritanical school. The roisterer, Matthew, was by this time forty-six years of age, and, I suppose, had grown

tired of roistering. In any case he appears to have settled down very quietly in the old family house in the Ullerton market-place, where he married a respectable damsel of the Puritan school, some seven years after, and in which house or in the neighbourhood whereof, he departed this life, with awful suddenness, one year after his marriage, leaving his son and heir, the reverend intestate. And now, my dear Hawkehurst, you're a sharp fellow, and I daresay a good hand at guessing social conundrums; so perhaps you begin to see my idea."

"I can't say I do."

"My notion is, that Matthew Haygarth may possibly have married before he was fifty-three years of age. Men of his stamp don't often live to that ripe age without being caught in matrimonial toils somehow or other. It was in the days of Fleet marriages, in the days when young men about town were even more reckless and more likely to become the prey of feminine deception than they are now. The fact that Matthew Haygarth revealed no such marriage is no conclu-

sive evidence against my hypothesis. He died very suddenly—intestate, as it seems the habit of these Haygarths to die; and he had never made any adjustment of his affairs. According to the oldest inhabitant in Ullerton almshouses, this Matthew was a very handsome fellow, generous-hearted, open-handed; a devil-may-care kind of a chap; the type of the rollicking heroes in old comedies; the very man to fall over head and ears in love before he was twenty, and to go through fire and water for the sake of the woman he loved. In short, the very last man upon earth to live a bachelor until his fifty-fourth year."

"He may—"

"He may have been a profligate, you were going to say, and have had baser ties than those of Church and State. So he may; but if he was a scoundrel, tradition flatters him. Of course all the information one can gather about a man who died in 1774 must needs be of a very uncertain and fragmentary character. But if I can trust the rather hazy recollections of my oldest inhabitant about what his father told him *his* father

had said of wild Mat Haygarth, the young man's wildness was very free from vice. There is no legend of innocence betrayed or infamy fostered by Matthew Haygarth. He appears to have enjoyed what the young men of that day called life —attended cock-fights, beat the watch, gambled a little, and was intimately acquainted with the interior of the Fleet and Marshalsea prisons. For nearly twenty years he seems to have lived in London; and during all those years he was lost sight of by the Ullerton people. My oldest inhabitant's grandfather was clerk to a merchant in the city of London, and had therefore some opportunity of knowing his old schoolfellow's proceedings in the metropolis. But the two townsmen don't seem to have seen much of each other in the big city. Their meetings were rare, and, so far as I can make out, for the most part accidental. But, as I said before, my oldest inhabitant is somewhat hazy, and excruciatingly prolix; his chaff is in the proportion of some fifty to one of his wheat. I've given a good deal of time to this case already, you see, Mr. Hawkehurst; and you'll find *your*

work very smooth sailing, compared to what I've gone through."

"I daresay that sort of investigation *is* rather tiresome in the earlier stages."

"You'd say so, with a vengeance, if you had to do it," answered George Sheldon almost savagely. "You start with the obituary of some old bloke who was so disgustingly old when he consented to die that there is no one living who can tell you when he was born, or who were his father and mother; for, of course, the old idiot takes care not to leave a blessed document of any kind which can aid a fellow in his researches. And when you've had the trouble of hunting up half-a-dozen men of the same name, and have addled your wretched brains in the attempt to patch the half-dozen men—turning up at different periods and in different places—into one man, they all tumble to pieces like a child's puzzle, and you find yourself as far as ever from the man you want. However, *you* won't have to do any of that work," added Mr. Sheldon, who was almost in a passion when he remembered the trouble he had

gone through. "The ground has been all laid out for you, by Jove, as smooth as a tea-garden; and if you look sharp, you'll pick up your three thou' before you know where you are."

"I hope I shall," answered Valentine coolly. He was not the sort of person to go into raptures about three thousand pounds, though such a sum must needs have seemed to him the wealth of a small Rothschild. "I know I want money badly enough, and am ready and willing to work for it conscientiously, if I get the chance. But to return to this Matthew Haygarth. Your idea is that there may have been a marriage previous to the one at Ullerton."

"Precisely. Of course there may have been no such previous marriage; but you see it's on the cards; and since it *is* on the cards, my notion is that we had better hunt up the history of Matthew Haygarth's life in London, and try to find our heir-at-law *there*, before we go in for the Judsons. If you knew how the Judsons have married and multiplied, and lost themselves among herds of other people, you wouldn't care about tracing the

ramifications of *their* family tree," said Mr. Sheldon with a weary sigh.

"So be it," exclaimed Mr. Hawkehurst carelessly; "we'll leave the Judsons alone, and go in for Matthew Haygarth."

He spoke with the air of an archæological Hercules, to whom difficulties were nothing. It seemed as if he would have been quite ready to "go in" for some sidereal branch of the Plantagenets, or the female descendants of the Hardi Canute family, if George Sheldon had suggested that the intestate's next of kin was to be found *there.*

"Mat Haygarth, by all means," he said. He was on jolly-good-fellow-ish terms with the dead and gone grocer's son already, and had the tone of a man who had been his friend and boon companion. "Mat Haygarth is our man. But how are we to ferret out his doings in London? A man who was born in 1720 is rather a remote kind of animal."

"The secret of success in these matters is time," answered the lawyer sententiously; "a

man must have no end of time; and he must keep his brain clear of all other business. Those two conditions are impossible for me, and that's why I want a coadjutor: now you're a clever young fellow, with no profession, with no particular social ties, as I can make out, and your time is all your own; ergo, you're the very man for this business. The thing is to be done: accept that for a certainty. It's only a question of time. Indeed, when you look at life philosophically, what is there on earth that is *not* a question of time? Give the crossing-sweeper between this and Chancery-lane time enough, and he might develop into a Rothschild. He might want nine hundred years or so to do it in; but there's no doubt he could do it, if you gave him time.'

Mr. Sheldon was becoming expansive under the influence of the brandy-and-soda; for even that mild beverage is not without its effect on the intellectual man.

"As to this Haygarth case," he resumed, after the consumption of a little more soda and a little more brandy, "it's a sure success, if we work

it properly; and you know three thou' is not to be despised," added George persuasively, "even if a fellow has to wait some time for it."

"Certainly not. And the bulk of the Haygarthian fortune — I suppose that's something rather stiff," returned Valentine, in the same persuasive tone.

"Well, you may suppose it's a decent figure," answered Mr. Sheldon with an air of deprecation, "or how could I afford to give you three thou' out of the share I'm likely to get?"

"No, to be sure. I think I shall take to the work well enough when once I get my hand in; but I shall be very glad of any hint you can give me at starting."

"Well, my advice is this: begin at the beginning; go down to Ullerton; see my oldest inhabitant; I pumped him as dry as I could, but I couldn't give myself enough time for thoroughly exhaustive pumping; one has to waste a small eternity before one gets anything valuable out of those hazy old fellows. Follow up this Matthew from his birth; see the place where he was born;

ferret out every detail of his life, so far as it is to be ferreted; trace his way step by step to London, and when you get him there, stick to him like a leech. Don't let him slip through your fingers for a day; hunt him from lodging to lodging, from tavern to tavern, into jail and out of jail—tantivy, yoicks, hark-forward! I know it's deuced hard work; but a man must work uncommonly hard in these days before he picks up three thou'. In a few words, the game is all before you; so go in and win," concluded George Sheldon, as he poured the last amber drops from the slim smoke-coloured bottle, and swallowed his glass of brandy undiluted by soda.

CHAPTER VII.

AUNT SARAH.

After that interview in Gray's Inn, there were more interviews of a like character. Valentine received further instructions from George Sheldon, and got himself posted up in the Haygarthian history, so far as the lawyer's information furnished the materials for such posting. But the sum total of Mr. Sheldon's information seemed very little to his coadjutor when the young man looked the Haygarthian business full in the face and considered what he had to do. He felt very much like a young prince in the fairy tale who has been bidden to go forth upon an adventurous journey in a trackless forest, where, if he escape all manner of lurking dangers, and remember innumerable injunctions, such as not to utter a single syllable during the

whole course of his travels, or look over his left shoulder, or pat any strange dog, or gather forest-fruit or flower, or look at his own reflection in mirror or water-pool, shining brazen shield or jewelled helm, he will ultimately find himself before the gates of an enchanted castle, to which he may or may not obtain admittance.

Valentine fancied himself in the position of this favourite young prince. The trackless forest was the genealogy of the Haygarths; and in the enchanted castle he was to find the crown of success in the shape of three thousand pounds. Could he marry Charlotte on the strength of those three thousand pounds, if he were so fortunate as to unravel the tangled skein of the Haygarth history? Ah, no; that black-whiskered stockbroking stepfather would ask for something more than three thousand pounds from the man to whom he gave his wife's daughter.

"He will try to marry her to some rich City swell, I daresay," thought Valentine; "I should be no nearer her with three thousand pounds for my fortune than I am without a sixpence. The

best thing I can do for her happiness and my own is to turn my back upon her, and devote myself to hunting the Haygarths. It's rather hard too, just as I have begun to fancy that she likes me a little."

In the course of those interviews in Gray's Inn which occurred before Valentine took any active steps in his new pursuit certain conditions were agreed upon between him and Mr. Sheldon. The first and most serious of these conditions was, that Captain Paget should be in nowise enlightened as to his protégé's plans. This was a strong point with George Sheldon. "I have no doubt Paget's a very good fellow," he said.—It was his habit to call everybody a good fellow. He would have called Nana Sahib a good fellow, and would have made some good-natured excuse for any peccadilloes on the part of that potentate.—"Paget's an uncommonly agreeable man, you know; but he is not the man I should care to trust with *this* kind of secret." Mr. Sheldon said this with a tone that implied his willingness to trust Captain Paget with every other

kind of secret, from the contents of his japanned office-boxes to the innermost mysteries of his soul.

"You see Paget is thick with my brother Phil," he resumed; "and whenever I find a man thick with my relations, I make it a point to keep clear of that man myself. Relations never have worked well in harness, and never will work well in harness. It seems to be against nature. Now Phil has a dim kind of idea of the game I want to play, in a general way, but nothing more than a dim idea. He fancies I'm a fool, and that I'm wasting my time and trouble. I mean him to stick to that notion. For, you see, in a thing of this kind there's always the chance of other people cutting in and spoiling a man's game. Of course, that advertisement I read to you was seen by other men besides me, and may have been taken up. My hope is that whoever has taken it up has gone in for the female branch, and got himself snowed up under a heap of documentary evidence about the Judsons. That's another reason why we

should put our trust in Matthew Haygarth. The Judson line is the obvious line to follow, and there are very few who would think of hunting up evidence for a hypothetical first marriage until they had exhausted the Judsons. Now, I rely upon you to throw dust in Paget's eyes, so there may be no possibility of my brother getting wind of our little scheme through *him*."

"I'll take care of that," answered Valentine; "he doesn't want me just now. He's in very high feather, riding about in broughams and dining at West-end taverns. He won't be sorry to get rid of me for a short time."

"But what'll be your excuse for leaving town? He'll be sure to want a reason, you know."

"I'll invent an aunt at Ullerton, and tell him I'm going down to stop with her."

"You'd better not say Ullerton; Paget might take it into his head to follow you down there in order to see what sort of person your aunt was, and whether she had any money. Paget's an excellent fellow, but there's never any knowing

what that sort of man will do. You'd better throw him off the scent altogether. Plant your aunt in Surrey—say Dorking."

"But if he should want to write to me?"

"Tell him to address to the post-office, Dorking, as your aunt is inquisitive, and might tamper with your correspondence. I daresay his letters will keep."

"He could follow me to Dorking as easily as to Ullerton."

"Of course he could," answered George Sheldon, "but then you see at Dorking the most he could find out would be that he'd been made a fool of; whereas if he followed you to Ullerton, he might ferret out the nature of your business there."

Mr. Hawkehurst perceived the wisdom of this conclusion, and agreed to make Dorking the place of his relative's abode.

"It's very near London," he suggested thoughtfully; "the Captain might easily run down."

"And for that very reason he's all the less

likely to do it," answered the lawyer; "a man who thinks of going to a place within an hour's ride of town knows he can go any day, and is likely to think of going to the end of the chapter without carrying out his intention. A man who resolves to go to Manchester or Liverpool has to make his arrangements accordingly, and is likely to put his idea into practice. The people who live on Tower-hill very seldom see the inside of the Tower. It's the good folks who come up for a week's holiday from Yorkshire and Cornwall who know all about the Crown jewels and John of Gaunt's armour. Take my advice, and stick to Dorking."

Acting upon this advice, Valentine Hawkehurst lay in wait for the Promoter that very evening. He went home early, and was seated by a cheery little bit of fire, such as an Englishman likes to see at the close of a dull autumn day, when that accomplished personage returned to his lodgings.

"Deuced tiresome work," said the Captain, as he smoothed the nap of his hat with that

caressing tenderness of manipulation peculiar to the man who is not very clear as to the means whereby his next hat is to be obtained,—"deuced slow, brain-belabouring work! How many people do you think I've called upon to-day, eh, Val? Seven-and-thirty! What do you say to that? Seven-and-thirty interviews, and some of them very tough ones. I think that's enough to take the steam out of a man."

"Do the moneyed swells bite?" asked Mr. Hawkehurst with friendly interest.

"Rather slowly, my dear Val, rather slowly. The mercantile fisheries have been pretty well whipped of late years, and the fish are artful—they are uncommonly artful, Val. Indeed I'm not quite clear at this present moment as to the kind of fly they'll rise to most readily. I'm half-inclined to be doubtful whether your gaudy pheasant-feather, your brougham and lavender-kid business, *is* the right thing for your angler. It has been overdone, Val, considerably overdone; and I shouldn't wonder if a sober little brown fly,—a shabby old chap in a rusty great-

coat with a cotton umbrella under his arm,—wouldn't do the trick better. That sort of thing would look rich, you see, Val, rich and eccentric; and I think on occasions — with a *very* downy bird — I'd even go so far as a half-p'orth of snuff in a screw of paper. I really think a pinch of snuff out of a bit of paper, taken at the right moment, might turn the tide of a transaction."

Impressed by the brilliancy of this idea, Captain Paget abandoned himself for the moment to profound meditation, seated in his favourite chair, and with his legs extended before the cheerful blaze. He always had a favourite chair in every caravanserai wherein he rested in his manifold wanderings, and he had an unerring instinct which guided him in the selection of the most comfortable chair, and that one corner, to be found in every room, which is a sanctuary secure from the incursions of Boreas.

The day just ended had evidently not been a lucky one, and the Captain's gaze was darkly meditative as he looked into the ruddy little fire.

"I think I'll take a glass of cold water with a dash of brandy in it, Val," he said presently; and he said it with the air of a man who rarely tasted such a beverage; whereas it was as habitual with him to sit sipping brandy-and-water for an hour or so before he went to bed as it was for him to light his chamber candle. "That fellow Sheldon knows how to take care of himself," he remarked thoughtfully, when Valentine had procured the brandy-and-water. "Try some of that cognac, Val; it's not bad. To tell you the truth, I'm beginning to get sick of this promoting business. It pays very little better than the India-rubber agency, and it's harder work. I shall look about me for something fresh, if Sheldon doesn't treat me handsomely. And what have you been doing for the last day or two?" asked the Captain, with a searching glance at his protégé's face. "You're always hanging about Sheldon's place; but you don't seem to do much business with him. You and his brother George seem uncommonly thick."

"Yes, George suits me better than the stock-

broker. I never could get on very well with your ultra-respectable men. I'm as ready to 'undertake a dirty job' as any man; but I don't like a fellow to offer me dirty work and pretend it's clean."

"Ah, he's been getting you to do a little of the bear business, I suppose," said the Captain. "I don't see that your conscience need trouble you about that. Amongst a commercial people money must change hands. I can't see that it much matters how the change takes place."

"No, to be sure; that's a comfortable way of putting it, at any rate. However, I'm tired of going about in the ursine guise, and I'm going to cut it. I've an old aunt settled at Dorking who has got a little bit of money to leave, and I think I'll go and look her up."

"An aunt at Dorking! I never heard of her before."

"O yes you have," answered Mr. Hawkehurst with supreme nonchalance; "you've heard of her often enough, only you've a happy knack of not listening to other people's affairs. But you must

have been wrapped up in yourself with a vengeance if you don't remember to have heard me speak of my aunt—Sarah."

"Well, well, it may be so," murmured the Captain, almost apologetically. "Your aunt Sarah? Ah, to be sure; I have some recollection: is she your father's sister?"

"No, she's the sister of my maternal grandmother—a great-aunt, you know. She has a comfortable little place down at Dorking, and I can get free quarters there whenever I like; so as you don't particularly want me just now, I think I'll run down to her for a week or two."

The Captain had no objection to offer to this very natural desire on the part of his adopted son; nor did he concern himself as to the young man's motive for leaving London.

CHAPTER VIII.

CHARLOTTE PROPHESIES RAIN.

Mr. Hawkehurst had no excuse for going to the Lawn before his departure; but the stately avenues between Bayswater and Kensington are free to any man; and, having nothing better to do, Valentine put a shabby little volume of Balzac in his pocket and spent his last morning in town under the shadow of the mighty elms, reading one of the great Honoré's gloomiest romances, while the autumn leaves drifted round him, dancing fairy measures on the grass, and scraping and scuffling on the gravel, and while children with hoops and children with balls scampered and screamed in the avenue by which he sat. He was not particularly absorbed by his book. He had taken it haphazard from the tattered collection of cheap editions which he carried about

with him in his wanderings, ignominiously stuffed into the bottom of a portmanteau, amongst boots and clothes-brushes and disabled razors.

"I'm sick of them all," he thought; "the De Beauseants, and Rastignacs, the German Jews, and the patrician beauties, and the Israelitish Circes of the Rue Taitbout, and the sickly self-sacrificing provincial angels, and the ghastly *vieilles filles*. Had that man ever seen such a woman as Charlotte, I wonder—a bright creature, all smiles and sunshine, and sweet impulsive tenderness; an angel who can be angelic without being *poitrinaire*, and whose amiability never degenerates into debility? There is an odour of the dissecting-room pervading all my friend Balzac's novels, and I don't think he was capable of painting a fresh, healthy nature. What a mass of disease he would have made Lucy Ashton, and with what dismal relish he would have dilated upon the physical sufferings of Amy Robsart in the confinement of Cumnor Hall! No, my friend Honoré, you are the greatest and grandest of painters of the terrible school; but the time

comes when a man sighs for something brighter and better than your highest type of womanhood."

Mr. Hawkehurst put his book in his pocket, and abandoned himself to meditation, leaning forward with his elbows on his knees and his face buried in his hands, unconscious of the trundling hoops and screaming children.

"She is better and fairer than the fairest heroine of a novel," he thought. "She is like Heloise. Yes, the quaint old French fits her to a nicety:

> 'Elle ne fu oscure ne brune,
> Ains fu clere comme la lune,
> Envers qui les autres estoiles
> Ressemblent petites chandoiles.'

Mrs. Browning must have known such a woman:

> 'Her air had a meaning, her movements a grace;
> You turned from the fairest to gaze on her face;'

and yet

> 'She was not as pretty as women I know.'

Was she not?" mused the lover. "Is she not? Yes," he cried suddenly, as he saw a scarlet petticoat gleaming in the distance, and a bright

young face under a little black turban hat—prettiest and most bewitching of all feminine headgear, let fashion change as it may. "Yes," he cried, "she is the loveliest creature in the world, and I love her to distraction."

He rose, and went to meet the loveliest creature in the world, whose earthly name was Charlotte Halliday. She was walking with Diana Paget, who, to more sober judges, might have seemed the handsomer woman of the two. Alas for Diana! the day had been when Valentine Hawkehurst considered her very handsome, and had need to fight a hard battle with himself in order not to fall in love with her. He had been conqueror in that struggle of prudence and honour against nascent love, only to be vanquished utterly by Charlotte's brighter charms and Charlotte's sunnier nature.

The two girls shook hands with Mr. Hawkehurst. An indifferent observer might have perceived that the colour faded from the face of one, while a blush mounted to the cheeks of the other. But Valentine did not see the sudden pallor of

Diana's face — he had eyes only for Charlotte's blushes. Nor did Charlotte herself perceive the sudden change in her dearest friend's countenance. And that perhaps is the bitterest sting of all. It is not enough that some must weep while others play; the mourners must weep unnoticed, unconsoled; happiness is so apt to be selfish.

Of course the conversation was the general sort of thing under the given circumstances—just a little more inane and disjointed than the ordinary small talk of people who meet each other in their walks abroad.

"How do you do, Mr. Hawkehurst? Very well, thank you. Mamma is very well; at least no, not quite well; she has one of her headaches this morning. She is rather subject to headache, you know; and the canaries sing so loud. Don't the canaries sing abominably loud, Diana?—loudly they would have made me say at Hyde-lodge; but it is only awfully clever people who know when to use adverbs."

And Miss Halliday having said all this in a hurried and indeed almost breathless manner,

stopped suddenly, blushing more deeply than at first, and painfully aware of her blushes. She looked imploringly at Diana; but Diana would not come to the rescue; and this morning Mr. Hawkehurst seemed as a man struck with sudden dumbness.

There followed presently a little discussion of the weather. Miss Halliday was possessed by the conviction that there would be rain—possibly not immediate rain, but before the afternoon inevitable rain. Valentine thought not; was indeed positively certain there would be no rain; had a vague idea that the wind was in the north; and quoted a dreary Joe-Millerism to prove the impossibility of rain while the wind came from that quarter. Miss Halliday and Mr. Hawkehurst held very firmly to their several opinions, and the argument was almost a quarrel; one of those little playful quarrels which form one of the most delicious phases of a flirtation.

"I would not mind wagering a fortune—if I had one—on the certainty of rain," cried Charlotte with kindling eyes.

"And I would not shrink from staking my existence on the conviction that there will be no rain," exclaimed Valentine, looking with undisguised tenderness at the glowing animated face.

Diana Paget took no part in that foolish talk about the possibilities of the weather. She walked silently by the side of her friend Charlotte, as far away from her old comrade, it seemed to her, as if the Atlantic's wild waste of waters had stretched between them. The barrier that divided them was only Charlotte; but then Miss Paget knew too well that Charlotte in this case meant all the world.

The ice had been broken by that discussion as to rain or no rain; and Miss Halliday and Mr. Hawkehurst talked pleasantly for some time, while Diana still walked silently by her friend's side, only speaking when compelled to do so. The strangeness of her manner would have been observed by anyone not utterly absorbed by that sublime egotism called love; but Valentine and Charlotte were so absorbed, and had no idea that

Miss Paget was anything but the most delightful and amusing of companions.

They had taken more than one turn in the broad avenue, when Charlotte asked Mr. Hawkehurst some question about a piece which was speedily to be played at one of the theatres.

"I do so much want to see this new French actress," she said. "Do you think there is any possibility of obtaining orders, Mr. Hawkehurst? You know what a dislike Mr. Sheldon has to paying for admission to a theatre, and my pocket-money was exhausted three weeks ago, or I wouldn't think of giving you any trouble about it."

Philosophers have observed that in the life of the plainest woman there is one inspired moment in which she becomes beautiful. Perhaps it is when she is asking a favour of some masculine victim — for women have a knack of looking their prettiest on such occasions. Charlotte Halliday's pleading glance and insinuating tone were irresistible. Valentine would have given a lien on every shilling of his three thousand pounds rather than disappoint her, if gold could purchase

the thing she craved. It happened fortunately that his occasional connection with newspapers made it tolerably easy for him to obtain free admissions to theatres.

"Do not speak of the trouble; there will be no trouble. The orders shall be sent you, Miss Halliday."

"O, thanks; a thousand thanks! Would it be possible to get a box, and for us all to go together?" asked the fair encroacher; "mamma is so fond of the theatre. She used to go often with poor papa, at York and in London. And you are such an excellent critic, Mr. Hawkehurst, and it would be so nice to have you with us; wouldn't it, Di? You know what a good critic Mr. Hawkehurst is?"

"Yes," answered Diana; "we used to go to theatres together very often."

This was a cry of anguish wrung from a bleeding heart; but to the two absorbed egotists it seemed the simplest of casual observations.

"Do you think you could manage to get a box, Mr. Hawkehurst?" asked the irresistible

enslaver, putting her head on one side, in a manner which, for the protection of weak mankind, should be made penal.

"I will try my uttermost," answered Valentine.

"O, then I'm sure you will succeed. And we shall be amused by your deliciously bitter criticisms between the acts. One would think you had studied under Douglas Jerrold."

"You do me too much honour. But before the new piece is produced I shall have left London, and shall not have the pleasure of accompanying you to the theatre."

"You are going to leave London?"

"Yes, to-morrow."

"So soon!" cried Charlotte with undisguised regret; "and for a long time, I suppose?" she added very mournfully.

Miss Paget gave a little start, and a feverish flush lit up her face for one brief moment.

"I am glad he is going," she thought; "I am very glad he is going."

"Yes," said Valentine, in reply to Charlotte's

inquiry, "I am likely to be away for a considerable time; indeed my plans are at present so vague, that I cannot tell when I may come back to town."

He could not resist the temptation to speak of his absence as if it were likely to be the affair of a lifetime. He could not refrain from the delight of sounding the pure depths of that innocent young heart. But when the tender gray eyes looked at him, so sweet in their sudden sadness, his heart melted, and he could trifle with her unconscious love no longer.

"I am going away on a matter of business," he said, "which may or may not occupy some time; but I don't suppose I shall be many weeks away from London."

Charlotte gave a little sigh of relief.

"And are you going very far?" she asked.

"Some distance; yes—a—hundred and fifty miles or so," Valentine answered very lamely. It had been an easy thing to invent an ancient aunt Sarah for the mystification of the astute Horatio; but Valentine Hawkehurst could not bring

himself to tell Charlotte Halliday a deliberate falsehood. The girl looked at him wonderingly, as he gave that hesitating answer to her question. She was at a loss to understand why he did not tell her the place to which he was going, and the nature of the business that took him away.

She was very sorry that he was going to disappear out of her life for a time so uncertain, that while on the one hand it might be only a few weeks, it might on the other hand be for ever. The life of a young English damsel, in a prim villa at Bayswater, with a very commonplace mother and a practical stockbroking stepfather, is rather a narrow kind of existence; and to such a damsel the stranger whose hand lifts the curtain that shrouds new and brighter worlds is apt to become a very important personage, especially when the stranger happens to be young and handsome, and invested with that dash of Bohemianism which to artless and sentimental girlhood has such a flavour of romance.

Charlotte was very silent as she retraced her steps along the broad gravel-walk. As they drew

near the Bayswater-gate she looked at her watch. It was nearly one o'clock, and she had promised Mrs. Sheldon to be home at one for luncheon, and afterwards shopping.

"I'm afraid we must hurry home, Di," she said.

"I am quite ready to go," answered Miss Paget promptly. "Good-bye, Valentine."

"Good-bye, Diana; good-bye, Miss Halliday."

Mr. Hawkehurst shook hands with both young ladies; but shaking hands with Charlotte was a very slow process compared to the same performance with Diana.

"Good-bye," he repeated in a lingering tone; and then, after standing for some moments silent and irresolute, with his hat in his hand, he put it on suddenly and hurried away.

The two girls had walked a few steps towards the gate when Charlotte stopped before a stony-looking alcove, which happened at this nursery-dinner-hour to be empty.

"I'm so tired, Di," she said, and went into

the alcove, where she sat down to rest. She had a little veil attached to her turban hat—a little veil which she now drew over her face. The tears gathered slowly in her eyes and fell through that flimsy morsel of lace with which she would fain have hidden her childish sorrow. The tears gathered and fell on her lap as she sat in silence, pretending not to cry. This much rain at least was there to justify her prediction, uttered in such foolish gaiety of heart half an hour before.

Miss Halliday's eyes were undimmed by tears when she went back to the gothic villa; but she had a feeling that some great sorrow had come upon her—a vague idea that the last lingering warmth and brightness of summer had faded all in a moment, and that chill gray winter had closed in upon Bayswater without any autumnal interval. What was it that she had lost? Only the occasional society of a young man with a handsome pale face, a little haggard and wan from the effect of dissipated habits and a previous acquaintance with care and difficulty—only the society of a penniless Bohemian who had a certain disreputable

cleverness and a dash of gloomy sentimentality, which the schoolgirl mistook for genius. But then he was the first man whose eyes had ever softened with a mysterious tenderness as they looked at her—the first whose voice had grown faintly tremulous when it syllabled her name.

There was some allusion to Mr. Hawkehurst's departure in the course of dinner, and Philip Sheldon expressed some surprise.

"Going to leave town?" he said.

"Yes, papa," Charlotte answered; "he is going a long way into the country,—a hundred and fifty miles, he said."

"Did he tell you where he was going?"

"No; he seemed unwilling to mention the place. He only said something about a hundred and fifty miles."

CHAPTER IX.

MR. SHELDON ON THE WATCH.

Mr. Sheldon had occasion to see Captain Paget early the following day, and questioned him closely about his protégé's movements. He had found Valentine a very useful tool in sundry intricate transactions of the commercial kind, and he expected his tools to be ready for his service. He was therefore considerably annoyed by Valentine's abrupt departure.

"I think young Hawkehurst might have told me he was going out of town," he said. "What the deuce has taken him off in such a hurry?"

"He is going to see some mysterious old aunt at Dorking, from whom he seems to expect money," the Captain answered carelessly. "I daresay I can do what you want, Sheldon."

"Very likely. But how comes that young

fellow to have an aunt at Dorking? I fancy I've heard him say he was without a relative or a friend in the world—always excepting yourself."

"The aunt may be another exception; some poor old soul that he's half ashamed to own, I daresay—the inmate of an almshouse, perhaps. Val's expectations may be limited to a few pounds hoarded in a china teapot."

"I should have thought Hawkehurst the last man in the world to care about looking after that sort of thing. I could have given him plenty to do if he had stopped in town. He and my brother George are uncommonly intimate, by the bye," added Mr. Sheldon meditatively. It was his habit to be rather distrustful of his brother and of all his brother's acquaintance. "I suppose you can give me Hawkehurst's address, in case I should want to write to him?" he said.

"He told me to send my letters to the post-office, Dorking," answered the Captain, "which really looks as if the aunt's residence were something in the way of an almshouse."

No more was said about Valentine's departure.

Captain Paget concluded his business with his patron and departed, leaving the stockbroker leaning forward upon his desk in a thoughtful attitude and scribbling purposeless figures upon his blotting-paper.

"There's something queer in this young man running away from town; there's some mystification *somewhere*," he thought. "He has not gone to Dorking, or he would scarcely have told Lotta that he was going a hundred and fifty miles from town. He would be likely to be taken off his guard by her questions, and would tell the truth. I wonder whether Paget is in the secret. His manner seemed open enough; but that sort of man can pretend anything. I've noticed that he and George have been very confidential lately. I wonder whether there's any underhand game on the cards between those two."

The game of which Mr. Sheldon thought as he leant over his blotting-paper was a very different kind of game from that which really occupied the attention of George and his friend.

"I'll go to his lodgings at once," he said to

himself by and by, rising and putting on his hat quickly in his eagerness to act upon his resolution. "I'll see if he really has left town."

The stockbroker hailed the first empty hansom to be seen in the crowded thoroughfare from which his shady court diverged. In less than an hour he alighted before the door of the house in which Captain Paget lodged.

"Is Mr. Hawkehurst in?" he asked of the girl who admitted him.

"No, sir; he's just left to go into the country. He hasn't been gone ten minutes. You might a'most have met him."

"Do you know where he has gone?"

"I heard say it was Dorking, sir."

"Humph! I should like to have seen him before he went. Did he take much luggage?"

"One portmanter, sir."

"I suppose you didn't notice where he told the man to drive?"

"Yes, sir; it was Euston-square."

"Ah, Euston-square. I'll go there, then, on the chance of catching him," said Mr. Sheldon.

He bestowed a donation upon the domestic, reëntered his hansom, and told the man to drive to Euston-square "like a shot."

"So! His destination is Dorking, and he goes from Euston-square!" muttered Mr. Sheldon in sombre meditation, as the hansom rattled and rushed and jingled and jolted over the stones. "There's something under the cards here."

Arrived at the great terminus, the stockbroker made his way to the down platform. There was a lull in the day's traffic, and only a few listless wretches lounging disconsolately here and there, with eyes ever and anon lifted to the clock. Amongst these there was no Valentine Hawkehurst.

Mr. Sheldon peered into all the waiting-rooms, and surveyed the refreshment-counter; but there was still no sign of the man he sought. He went back to the ticket-office; but here again all was desolate, the shutters of the pigeon-holes hermetically closed, and no vestige of Valentine Hawkehurst.

The stockbroker was disappointed, but not de-

feated. He returned to the platform, looked about him for a few moments, and then addressed himself to a porter of intelligent aspect.

"What trains have left here within the last half-hour?" he asked.

"Only one, sir; the 2.15 down, for Manchester."

"You didn't happen to notice a dark-eyed, dark-haired young man among the passengers—second class?" asked Mr. Sheldon.

"No, sir. There are always a good many passengers by that train; I haven't time to notice their faces."

The stockbroker asked no further questions. He was a man who did not care to be obliged to others for information which he could obtain for himself. He walked straight to a place where the time-tables were pasted on the wall, and ran his finger along the figures till he came to those he wanted.

The 2.15 train was a fast train which stopped at only four places—Rugby, Ullerton, Murford, and Manchester.

"I daresay he has gone to Manchester," thought Mr. Sheldon — "on some racing business most likely, which he wants to keep dark from his patron the Captain. What a fool I am to trouble myself about him, as if he couldn't stir without meaning mischief to me! But I don't understand the friendship between him and George. My brother George is not likely to take up any man without some motive."

After these reflections Mr. Sheldon left the station and went back to his office in another hansom, still extremely thoughtful and somewhat disquieted.

"What does it matter to me where they go or what they do?" he asked himself, impatient of some lurking weakness of his own; "what does it matter to me whether those two are friendly or unfriendly? They can do *me* no harm."

There happened to be a kind of lull in the stormy regions of the Stock Exchange at the time of Valentine Hawkehurst's departure. Stagnation had descended upon that commercial ocean which is such a dismal waste of waters for the profes-

sional speculator in its hours of calm. All the Bulls in the zoological creation would have failed to elevate the drooping stocks and shares and first-preference bonds and debentures, which hung their feeble heads and declined day by day, the weaker of them threatening to fade away and diminish to a vanishing-point, as it seemed to some dejected holders who read the Stock-Exchange lists and the money-article in the *Times* with a persistent hopefulness which struggled against the encroachments of despair. The Bears had been busy, but were now idle,—having burnt their fingers, commercial gentlemen remarked. So Bulls and Bears alike hung listlessly about a melancholy market, and conversed together dolefully in corners; and the burden of all their lamentations was to the effect that there never had been such times, and things never had been so bad, and it was a question whether they would ever right themselves. Philip Sheldon shared in the general depression. His face was gloomy, and his manner, for the time being, lost something of its brisk business-like cheerfulness. The

men who envied his better fortunes watched him furtively when he showed himself amongst them, and wondered whether Sheldon, of Jull, Girdlestone, and Sheldon, had been hit by these bad times.

It was not entirely the pressure of that commercial stagnation which weighed on the spirits of Philip Sheldon. The stockbroker was tormented by private doubts and uncertainties which had nothing to do with the money-market.

On the day after Valentine's journey to Ullerton, Mr. Sheldon the elder presented himself at his brother's office in Gray's Inn. It was his habit to throw waifs and strays of business in the attorney's way, and to make use of him occasionally, though he had steadily refused to lend or give him money; and it was his habit, as it were, to keep an eye upon his younger brother—rather a jealous eye, which took note of all George's doings, and kept suspicious watch upon all George's associates. Going unannounced into his brother's office on this particular morning,

Philip Sheldon found him bending over an outspread document—a great sheet of cartridge-paper covered with a net-work of lines, dotted about with circles, and with little patches of writing in red and black ink in the neatest possible penmanship. Mr. Sheldon the elder, whose bright black eyes were as the eyes of the hawk, took note of this paper, and had caught more than one stray word that stood out in larger and bolder characters than its neighbours, before his brother could fold it; for it is not an easy thing for a man to fold an elephantine sheet of cartridge when he is nervously anxious to fold it quickly, and is conscious that the eyes of an observant brother are upon him.

Before George had mastered the folding of the elephantine sheet, Philip had seen and taken note of two words. One of these was the word INTESTATE; the other the name HAYGARTH.

"You seem in a great hurry to get that document out of the way," said Philip, as he seated himself in the client's chair.

"Well, to tell the truth, you rather startled

me," answered George. "I didn't know who it might be, you know; and I was expecting a fellow who—" And then Mr. Sheldon the younger broke off abruptly, and asked, with rather a suspicious air, "Why didn't that boy announce you?"

"Because I wouldn't let him. Why should he announce me? One would think you were carrying on some political conspiracy, George, and had a modern Thistlewood gang hidden in that cupboard yonder. How thick you and Hawkehurst are, by the bye!"

In spite of the convenient "by the bye," this last remark of the stockbroker's sounded rather irrelevant.

"I don't know about being 'thick.' Hawkehurst seems a very decent young fellow, and he and I get on pretty well together. But I'm not as 'thick' with him as I was with Tom Halliday."

It was to be observed that Mr. Sheldon the younger was very apt to refer to that friendship with the dead Yorkshireman in the course of conversation with Philip.

"Hawkehurst has just left town," said Philip indifferently.

"Yes, I know he has."

"When did you hear it?"

"I saw him last night," answered George, taken off his guard by the carelessness of his brother's manner.

"Did you?" cried Mr. Sheldon. "You make a mistake there. He left town at two o'clock yesterday."

"How do you happen to know that?" asked George sharply.

"Because I happened to be at the station and saw him take his ticket. There's something underhand in that journey of his, by the way; for Paget told me he was going to Dorking. I suppose he and Paget have some game of their own on the cards. I was rather annoyed by the young man's departure, as I had some work for him. However, I can find plenty of fellows to do it as well as Hawkehurst could have done."

George was looking into an open drawer in his desk while his brother said this. He had a

habit of opening drawers and peering into them absently during the progress of an interview, as if looking for some particular paper that was never to be found.

After this the conversation became less personal. The brothers talked a little of the events of the day, the money-article in that morning's *Times*, the probability or improbability of a change in the rate of discount. But this conversation soon flagged, and Mr. Sheldon rose to depart.

"I suppose that sheet of cartridge-paper which you had so much trouble to fold is one of your genealogical tables," he said as he was going. "You needn't try to keep things dark from me, George. I'm not likely to steal a march upon you; my own business gives me more work than I can do. But if you have got a really good thing at last, I shouldn't mind going into it with you, and finding the money for the enterprise."

George Sheldon looked at his elder brother with a malicious glitter in his eyes.

"On condition that you got the lion's share of the profits," he said. "O yes; I know how

generous you are, Phil. I have asked you for money before to-day, and you have refused it."

Mr. Sheldon's face darkened just a little at this point. "Your manner of asking it was offensive," he said.

"Well, I'm sorry for that," answered George politely. "However, you refused me money when I did want it; so you needn't offer it me now I don't want it. There are some people who think I have sacrificed my life to a senseless theory; and perhaps you are one of them. But there is one thing you may be certain of, Philip Sheldon: if ever I *do* get a good chance, I shall know how to keep it to myself."

There are men skilled in the concealment of their feelings on all ordinary occasions, who will yet betray themselves in a crisis of importance. George Sheldon would fain have kept his project hidden from his elder brother; but in this one unguarded moment he forgot himself, and allowed the sense of triumph to irradiate his face.

The stockbroker was a reader of men rather than books; and it is a notable thing what supe-

riority in all worldly wisdom is possessed by men who eschew books. He was able to translate the meaning of George's smile—a smile of mingled triumph and malice.

"The fellow *has* got a good thing," he thought to himself; "and Hawkehurst is in it. It must be a deuced good thing too, or he wouldn't refuse my offer of money."

Mr. Sheldon was the last man in the world to reveal any mortification which he might experience from his brother's conduct.

"Well, you're quite right to stick to your chance, George," he said with agreeable frankness. "You've waited long enough for it. As for me, I've got my fingers in a good many pies just at present; so perhaps I had better keep them out of yours, whatever plums there may be to be picked out of it by an enterprising Jack Horner. Pick out your plums for yourself, old fellow, and I'll be one of the first to call you a good boy for your pains."

With this, Mr. Sheldon slapped his brother's shoulder and departed.

"I think I've had the best of Master Phil for once," muttered George; and then he thrust his sinewy hands into the depths of his trousers-pockets, and indulged in a silent laugh which displayed his strong square white teeth to perfection. "I flatter myself I took a rise out of Phil to-day," he muttered.

The sense of a malicious triumph over a social enemy is a very delightful kind of thing,—so delightful that a man is apt to ignore the possible cost of the enjoyment. It is like the pleasure of kicking a man who is down—very delicious in its way; only one never knows how soon the man may be up again.

George Sheldon, who was tolerably skilled in the science of human nature, should have known that "taking a rise" out of his brother was likely to be a rather costly operation. Philip was not the safest man to deal with at any time; but he was most dangerous when he was "jolly."

Book the Fourth.

VALENTINE HAWKEHURST'S RECORD.

CHAPTER I.

THE OLDEST INHABITANT.

Black Swan Inn, Ullerton, October 2d.

As the work I am now employed in is quite new to me, and I am to keep Sheldon posted up in this business day by day, I have decided on jotting down the results of my inquiries in a kind of diary. Instead of writing my principal a formal letter, I shall send a copy of the entries in the diary, revised and amended. This will insure exactitude; and there is just the possibility that the record may be useful to me hereafter. To remember all I hear and pick up about these departed Haygarths without the aid of pen and ink would be out of the question; so I mean to go in for unlimited pen-and-ink like a hero, not to say a martyr.

And I am to do all this for twenty shillings a week, and the remote possibility of three thou-

sand pounds! O genius, genius! in all the markets of this round world is there no better price for you than that?

How sweetly my Charlotte looked at me yesterday, when I told her I was going away! If I could have dared to kneel at her feet under those whispering elms,—unconscious of the children, unconscious of the nursemaids;—if I could have dared to cry aloud to her, "I am a penniless reprobate, but I love you; I am a disreputable pauper, but I adore you! Have pity upon my love and forget my worthlessness!" If I could have dared to carry her away from her prim suburban home and that terrible black-whiskered stockbroking stepfather! But how is a man to carry off the woman he adores when he has not the *de quoi* for the first stage of the journey?

With three thousand pounds in my pocket, I think I could dare anything. Three thousand pounds! One year of splendour and happiness, and then—the rest is chaos!

I have seen the oldest inhabitant. *Ay de mi!* Sheldon did not exaggerate the prosiness of that

intolerable man. I thought of the luckless wedding guest in Coleridge's grim ballad as I sat listening to this modern-ancient mariner. I had to remind myself of all the bright things to be bought for three thousand pounds, every now and then, in order to endure with fortitude, if not serenity. And now the day's work is done, I begin to think it might as well have been left undone. How am I to disintegrate the mass of prosiness which I have heard this day? For three mortal hours did I listen to my ancient mariner; and how much am I the wiser for my patience? Clever as you may fancy yourself, my friend Hawkehurst, you don't seem to be the man for this business. You have not the legal mind. Your genius is not the genius of Scotland-yard, and I begin to fear that in your new line you may prove yourself a failure.

However, where all is dark to me, the astute Sheldon may see daylight, so I'll observe the letter of my bond, and check off the residuum of the ancient mariner's prosiness.

By dint of much pumping I obtained from my

ancient, first, his father's recollections of Matthew Haygarth a few years before his death, and secondly, his grandfather's recollections of Matthew in his wild youth. It seems that in those last years of his life Matthew was a most sober and estimable citizen; attended the chapel of a nonconforming sect; read the works of Baxter, and followed in the footsteps of his departed father; was a kind husband to a woman who appears to me to have been rather a pragmatical and icy personage, but who was esteemed a model of womanly virtue, and who had money. Strange that these respectable and wealthy citizens should be so eager to increase their store by alliance with respectable and wealthy citizenesses!

In his later years Matthew Haygarth seems to have imitated his father in many respects. Like his father, he executed more than one will; and like his father, he died intestate. The lawyer who drew up his will on more than one occasion was a man called Brice—like his client, eminently respectable.

After his marriage, our esteemed Matthew

retired to a modest mansion in the heart of the country, and some ten or fifteen miles from Ullerton. The mansion in question is at a place called Dewsdale, and was the property of the wife, and accrued to him through her.

This house and estate of some thirty acres was afterwards sold by the rev. intestate, John Haygarth, shortly after his coming of age, and within a year of his mother's death.

This much and no more could I extort from the oldest inhabitant relative to the latter days of our Matthew.

Respecting his wild youth I obtained the following crumbs of enlightenment. In the year 1741-2, being then one-and-twenty years of age, he left Ullerton. It is my ancient mariner's belief that he ran away from home, after some desperate quarrel with his father; and it is also the belief of my ancient that he stayed away, without intermission, for twenty years,—though on what precise fact that belief is founded, is much more than I can extract from the venerable proser.

My ancient suggests—always in the haziest and most impracticable manner—the possibility that Matthew in his wild days lodged somewhere Clerkenwell way. He has a dim idea that he has heard his grandfather speak of St. John's-gate, Clerkenwell, in connection with Matthew Haygarth; but, as my ancient's grandfather seems to have been almost imbecile at the time he made such remarks, *this* is not much.

He has another idea—also very vague and impracticable—of having heard his grandfather say something about an adventure of Matthew Haygarth's, which was rather a heroic affair in its way—an adventure in which, in some inexplicable manner, the wild Matthew is mixed up with a dancing-girl, or player-girl, of Bartholomew Fair, and a nobleman.

This is the sum-total of the information to be extracted in three mortal hours from my ancient. Altogether the day has been very unsatisfactory; and I begin to think I'm not up to the sort of work required of me.

Oct. 3d. Another long interview with my an-

cient. I dropped in directly after my breakfast, and about an hour after his dinner. I sat up late last night, occupied till nearly ten in copying my diary for Sheldon—which was just in time for the London post—and lingering over my cigar till past midnight, thinking of Charlotte. So I was late this morning.

My ancient received me graciously. I took him half a pound of mild bird's-eye tobacco, on diplomatic grounds. He is evidently the sort of person who would receive Mephistopheles graciously, if the fiend presented him with tobacco.

I returned to the charge—diplomatically, of course; talked about Ullerton and Ullerton people in general, insinuating occasional questions about the Haygarths. I was rewarded by obtaining some little information about Mrs. Matthew. That lady appears to have been a devoted disciple of John Wesley, and was fonder of travelling to divers towns and villages to hear the discourses of that preacher than her husband approved. It seems they were wont to disagree upon this subject.

For some years before her marriage Mrs. Matthew was member of a Wesleyan confraternity, in those days newly established at Ullerton. They held meetings and heard sermons in the warehouse of a wealthy draper; and shortly before Mrs. Matthew's demise they built a chapel, still extant, in a dingy little thoroughfare known as Water-house-lane.

On these points my ancient mariner is tolerably clear. They belong to the period remembered by his father.

And now I believe him to be pumped dry. I gave him my benediction, and left him smoking some of my tobacco, content with himself and with the world—always excepting the authorities, or board, of the almshouses, against whom he appears to nourish a grievance.

After leaving him, I walked about Ullerton for an hour or so before returning to my humble hostelry. The streets of Ullerton are sealed with the seal of desolation—the abomination of desolation reigns in the market-place, where the grass flourishes greenly in the interstices of the pave-

ment. The place has known prosperity, and is prosperous no longer: but although its chief trade has left it, there are still some three or four factories in full swing. I heard clanging bells, and met bare-headed women and uncouth-looking men hurrying to and fro. I went to look at the Wesleyan chapel in Waterhouse-lane. It is a queer little building, and bears some resemblance to a toy Noah's Ark in red brick. Tall warehouses have arisen about it and hemmed it in, and the slim chimney-shaft of a waterworks throws a black shadow aslant its unpretending façade. I inquired the name of the present minister. He is called Jonah Goodge, began life as a carpenter, and is accounted the pink and pattern of piety.

Oct. 4th. A letter from Sheldon awaited me in the coffee-room letter-rack when I went downstairs to breakfast.

"My dear Hawkehurst, — Don't be disheartened if the work seems slow at first. You'll soon get used to it.

"I should recommend you to adopt the following tactics:

"1st. Go to the house at Dewsdale, inhabited by M. H. and his wife. You may have some difficulty in obtaining admission—and full liberty to explore and examine—from the present servant or owner; but you are not the man I take you for if you cannot overcome such a difficulty. I enclose a few of my cards, which you can use at your discretion. They show professional status. It would be as well to call yourself my articled clerk, and to state that you are prosecuting an inquiry on the behalf of a client of mine, who wishes to prove a certain event in the past, connected remotely with the H. family. If asked whether your business relates to the property left by the rev. intestate, you must reply decisively in the negative. But I must remind you that extreme caution is required in every move you make. Wherever you can do your work *without* any reference to the name of Haygarth, avoid such reference. Always remember that there may be other people on the same scent.

"2d. Examine the house in detail; look for old pictures, old furniture, old needlework; if you are lucky enough to find the Haygarth furniture was sold with the property, which I should think probable. The rev. intestate must have been at the University when he made the sale; and a young Cantab would in all likelihood pass over his ancestral chairs and tables to the purchaser of his ancestral mansion, as so much useless lumber. It is proverbial that walls have ears. I hope the Dewsdale walls may have tongues, and favour you with a little information.

"3d. When you have done all that is to be done at Dewsdale, your next work must be to hunt up any scion of the lawyer Brice; if such scion be in existence at Ullerton. Or if not to be found in Ullerton, ascertain where the descendant, or descendants, of Brice, is, or are, to be found. Brice, the lawyer, must have known the contents of those wills executed and afterwards destroyed by Haygarth, and may have kept rough drafts, copies, or memoranda of the same. This is most important.

—Yours truly, G. S."

This Sheldon is a wonderful man, and a cautious!—no signature to his letter.

I started for Dewsdale immediately after my breakfast. I have made arrangements for boarding in this house, which is a second-rate commercial inn. They have agreed to give me board and lodging for twenty shillings a week — the full amount of my stipend: so all that I gain by my researches in the affairs of the departed Matthew is food and shelter. However, as this food and shelter is perhaps more honestly obtained than those little dinners which I have so often eaten with the great Horatio, I will try to fancy a sweetness in the tough steaks and greasy legs of mutton. O sheep of Midlandshire! why cultivate such ponderous calves, and why so incline to sinews? O cooks of Midlandshire! why so superficial in the treatment of your roasts, so impetuous and inconsiderate when you boil?

A railroad now penetrates the rural district in which the village of Dewsdale is situated. There is a little station, something like a wooden Dutch oven, within a mile of the village; and here I

alighted. The morning savoured of summer rather than autumn. The air was soft and balmy, the sunshine steeped the landscape in warm light, and the red and golden tints of the fading foliage took new splendour from that yellow sunshine. A man whose life is spent in cities must be dull of soul indeed if he does not feel a little touched by the beauty of rustic scenery, when he finds himself suddenly in the heart of the country. I had seen nothing so fair as those English fields and copses since I left the pine-clad hills of Forêtdechêne. An idiotic boy directed me across some fields to Dewsdale. He sent me a mile out of the way; but I forgave and blest him, for I think the walk did me good. I felt as if all manner of vicious vapours were being blown out of my head as the soft wind lifted my hair.

And so to Dewsdale. Strolling leisurely through those quiet meadows, I fell to thinking of many things that seldom came into my mind in London. I thought of my dead mother—a poor gentle creature, too frail to carry heroically the burden laid upon her, and so a little soured by chronic debt

and difficulty. I have reason to remember her tenderly; we shared so much misery together. I believe my father married her in the Rules of the Bench; and if I am not sure upon this point, I know for a certainty that I was born within those mystic boundaries.

And then my mind wandered to those nomadic adventures in which poor Diana Paget and I were so much together. I think we were a little fond of each other in those days; but in that matter I was at least prudent; and now the transient fancy has faded, on Di's part as well as on mine.

If I could be as prudent where Charlotte H. is concerned!

But prudence and Charlotte's eyes cannot hold their own in the same brain. Of two things, one, as our neighbours say: a man must cease to be prudent, or he must forget those bewitching gray eyes.

I know she was sorry when she heard of my intended departure.

This is her birthday. She is twenty-one years of age to-day. I remember the two girls talking

of it, and Miss Halliday declaring herself "quite old." My dear one, I drink your health in this poor tavern liquor, with every tender wish and holy thought befitting your innocent girlhood.

CHAPTER II.

MATTHEW HAYGARTH'S RESTING-PLACE.

I FOUND the house at Dewsdale without difficulty. It is a stiff, square, red-brick dwelling-place, with long narrow windows, a high narrow door, and carved canopy; a house which savours of the *Tatler* and *Spectator;* a house in which the short-faced gentleman might have spent his summer holidays after Sir Roger's death. It stands behind a high iron gate, surmounted by a handsome coat of arms; and before it there lies a pleasant patch of greensward, with a pond and a colony of cackling geese, which craned their necks and screamed at me as I passed them.

The place is the simplest and smallest of rural villages. There is a public-house — the Seven Stars; a sprinkling of humble cottages; a general shop which is at once a shoemaker's, a grocer's,

a linendraper's, a stationer's, and a post-office. These habitations, a gray old church with a square tower, half-hidden by the sombre foliage of yews and cedars, and the house once inhabited by the Haygarths, comprise the whole of the village. The Haygarthian household is now the rectory. I ascertained this fact from the landlord of the Seven Stars, at which house of entertainment I took a bottle of soda-water, in order to *sonder le terrain* before commencing business.

The present rector is an elderly widower with seven children; an easy good-natured soul, who is more prone to bestow his money in charity than to punctuality in the payment of his debts.

Having discovered thus much, I rang the bell at the iron gate and boarded the Haygarthian mansion. The rector was at home, and received me in a very untidy apartment, *par excellence* a study. A boy in a holland blouse was smearing his face with his inky fingers, and wrestling with a problem in Euclid, while his father stood on a step-ladder exploring a high shelf of dusty books.

The rector, whose name is Wendover, de-

scended from the step-ladder and shook the dust from his garments. He is a little withered old man, with a manner so lively as to be on the verge of flightiness. I observed that he wiped his dusty palms on the skirts of his coat, and argued therefrom that he would be an easy person to deal with. I soon found that my deduction was correct.

I presented Sheldon's card and stated my business, of course acting on that worthy's advice. Could Mr. Wendover give me any information relating to the Haygarth family?

Fortune favoured me throughout this Dewsdale expedition. The rector is a simple garrulous old soul, to whom to talk is bliss. He has occupied the house five-and-thirty years. He rents it of the lord of the manor, who bought it from John Haygarth. Not a stick of furniture has been removed since our friend Matthew's time; and the rev. intestate may have wrestled with the mysteries of Euclid on the same old-fashioned mahogany table at which I saw the boy in brown holland.

Mr. Wendover left his books and manuscripts scattered on the floor of the study, and conducted me to a cool shady drawing-room, very shabbily furnished with the spindle-legged chairs and tables of the last century. Here he begged me to be seated, and here we were ever and anon interrupted by intruding juveniles, the banging of doors, and the shrill clamour of young voices in the hall and garden.

I brought all the diplomacy of which I am master to bear in my long interview with the rector: and the following is a transcript of our conversation, after a good deal of polite skirmishing:

Mosely. You see, my dear sir, the business I am concerned in is remotely connected with these Haygarths. Any information you will kindly afford me, however apparently trivial, may be of service in the affair I am prosecuting.

The Rector. To be sure, to be sure! But, you see, though I've heard a good deal of the Haygarths, it is all gossip—the merest gossip. People are so fond of gossip, you know,—especially coun-

try people: I have no doubt you have remarked that. Yes, I have heard a great deal about Matthew Haygarth. My late clerk and sexton,—a very remarkable man, ninety-one when he died, and able to perform his duties very creditably within a year of his death—very creditably; but the hard winter of '56 took him off, poor fellow, and now I have a young man,—old Andrew Hone —that was my late clerk's name—was employed in this house when a lad, and was very fond of talking about Matthew Haygarth and his wife. She was a rich woman, you know, a very rich woman—the daughter of a brewer at Ullerton; and this house belonged to her—inherited from her father.

Myself. And did you gather from your clerk that Matthew Haygarth and his wife lived happily together?

The Rector. Well, yes, yes; I never heard anything to the contrary. They were not a young couple, you know. Rebecca Caulfield was forty years of age, and Matthew Haygarth was fifty-three when he married; so, you see, one could

hardly call it a love-match. [*Abrupt inroad of bouncing damsel, exclaiming "Pa!"*] Don't you see I'm engaged, Sophia Louisa? Why are you not at your practice? [*Sudden retreat of bouncing damsel, followed by the scrambling performance of scale of C major in adjoining chamber, which performance abruptly ceases after five minutes.*] You see Mrs. Haygarth was *not* young, as I was about to observe when my daughter interrupted us; and she was perhaps a little more steadfast in her adherence to the newly arisen sect of Wesleyans than was pleasing to her husband, although he consented to become a member of that sect. But as their married life lasted only a year, they had little time for domestic unhappiness, even supposing them not to be adapted to each other.

Myself. Mrs. Matthew Haygarth did not marry again?

The Rector. No; she devoted herself to the education of her son, and lived and died in this house. The room which is now my study she furnished with a small reading-desk and a couple of benches, now in my nursery, and made it into

a kind of chapel, in which the keeper of the general shop—who was, I believe, considered a shining light amongst the Wesleyan community—was in the habit of holding forth every Sunday morning to such few members of that sect as were within reach of Dewsdale. She died when her son was nineteen years of age, and was buried in the family vault in the churchyard yonder. Her son's adherence to the Church of England was a very great trouble to her. [*Inroad of boy in holland, very dejected and inky of aspect, also exclaiming "Pa!"*] No, John; not till that problem is worked out. Take that cricket-bat back to the lobby, sir, and return to your studies. [*Sulky withdrawal of boy.*] You see what it is to have a large family, Mr. — Sheldon. I beg pardon, Mr.—

Myself. Hawkehurst, clerk to Mr. Sheldon.

The Rector. To be sure. I have some thoughts of the Law for one of my elder sons; the Church is terribly over-crowded. However, as I was on the point of saying when my boy John disturbed us, though I have heard a great deal of gossip

about the Haygarths, I fear I can give you very little substantial information. Their connection with Dewsdale lasted little more than twenty years. Matthew Haygarth was married in Dewsdale church, his son John was christened in Dewsdale church, and he himself is buried in the churchyard. That is about as much positive information as I can give you; and you will perhaps remark that the parish register would afford you as much.

After questioning the good-natured old rector rather closely, and obtaining little more than the above information, I asked permission to see the house.

"Old furniture and old pictures are apt to be suggestive," I said; "and perhaps while we are going over the house you may happen to recall some further particulars relating to the Haygarth family."

Mr. Wendover assented. He was evidently anxious to oblige me, and accepted my explanation of my business in perfect good faith. He con-

ducted me from room to room, waiting patiently while I scrutinised the panelled walls and stared at the attenuated old furniture. I was determined to observe George Sheldon's advice to the very letter, though I had little hope of making any grand melodramatic discovery in the way of documents hidden in old cabinets, or mouldering behind sliding panels.

I asked the rector if he had ever found papers of any kind in forgotten nooks and corners of the house or the furniture. His reply was a decided negative. He had explored and investigated every inch of the old dwelling-place, and had found nothing.

So much for Sheldon's idea.

Mr. Wendover led me from basement to garret, encountering bouncing daughters and boys in brown holland wherever we went; and from basement to garret I found that all was barren. In the whole of the house there was but one object which arrested my attention, and the interest which that one object aroused in my mind had no relation to the Haygarthian fortune.

Over a high carved chimney-piece in one of the bed-chambers there hung a little row of miniatures — old-fashioned oval miniatures, pale and faded — pictures of men and women with the powdered hair of the Georgian period, and the flowing full-bottomed wigs familiar to St. James's and Tunbridge-wells in the days of inoffensive Anne. There were in all seven miniatures, six of which specimens of antique portraiture were prim and starched and artificial of aspect. But the seventh was different in form and style: it was the picture of a girlish face looking out of a frame of loose unpowdered locks; a bright innocent face, with gray eyes and marked black eyebrows, pouting lips a little parted, and white teeth gleaming between lips of rosy red; such a face as one might fancy the inspiration of an old poet. I took the miniature gently from the little brass hook on which it hung, and stood for some time looking at the bright frank face.

It was the picture of Charlotte Halliday. Yes; I suppose there is a fatality in these things. It was one of those marvellous accidental resem-

blances which every man has met with in the course of his life. Here was this dead-and-gone beauty of the days of George the Second smiling upon me with the eyes and lips of Philip Sheldon's stepdaughter!

Or was it only a delusion of my own? Was my mind so steeped in the thought of that girl, was my heart so impressed by her beauty, that I could not look upon a fair woman's face without conjuring up her likeness in the pictured countenance? However this may be, I looked long and tenderly at the face which seemed to me to resemble the woman I love.

Of course I questioned the rector as to the original of this particular miniature. He could tell me nothing about it, except that he thought it was *not* one of the Caulfields or Haygarths. The man in the full-bottomed Queen-Anne wig was Jeremiah Caulfield, brewer, father of the pious Rebecca; the woman with the high powdered head was the pious Rebecca herself; the man in the George-the-Second wig was Matthew Haygarth. The other three were kindred of Re-

becca's. But the wild-haired damsel was some unknown creature, for whose presence Mr. Wendover was unable to account.

I examined the frame of the miniature, and found that it opened at the back. Behind the ivory on which the portrait was painted there was a lock of dark hair incased in crystal; and on the inside of the case, which was of some worthless metal gilded, there was scratched the name "Molly."

How this Molly with the loose dark locks came to be admitted among the prim and pious Caudfields is certainly more than I can understand.

My exploration of the house having resulted only in this little romantic accident of the likeness to Charlotte, I prepared to take my departure, no wiser than when I had first crossed the threshold. The rector very politely proposed to show me the church; and as I considered that it would be well to take a copy of the Haygarthian entries in the register, I availed myself of his offer. He despatched a maid-servant to summon his clerk, in order that that functionary might assist in the

investigation of the registers. The girl departed on this errand, while her master conducted me across his garden, in which there is now a gate opening into the churchyard.

It is the most picturesque of burial-grounds, darkened by the shadow of those solemn yews and spreading cedars. We walked very slowly between the crumbling old tombstones, which have almost all grown one-sided with time. Mr. Wendover led me through a little labyrinth of lowly graves to a high and ponderous iron railing surrounding a square space, in the midst of which there is a stately stone monument. In the railing there is a gate, from which a flight of stone steps leads down to the door of a vault. It is altogether rather a pretentious affair, wherein one sees the evidence of substantial wealth unelevated by artistic grace or poetic grandeur.

This is the family vault of the Caulfields and Haygarths.

"I've brought you to look at this tomb," said the rector, resting his hand upon the rusted railing, "because there is rather a romantic story

connected with it—a story that concerns Matthew Haygarth, by the bye. I did not think of it just now, when we were talking of him; but it flashed on my memory as we came through the garden. It is rather a mysterious affair; and though it is not very likely to have any bearing upon the object of your inquiry, I may as well tell you about it,—as a leaf out of family history, you know, Mr. Hawkehurst, and as a new proof of the old adage that truth is stranger than fiction."

I assured the rector that I should be glad to hear anything he could tell me.

"I must premise that I only tell the story as I got it from my old clerk, and that it may therefore seem rather indistinct; but there is an entry in the register yonder to show that it is not without foundation. However, I will waste no more words in preamble, but give you the story, which is simply this—"

The rector seated himself on a dilapidated old tombstone, while I leaned against the rails of the Haygarth vault, looking down upon him.

"Within a month or two of Matthew Hay-

garth's death, a kind of melancholy came over him," said the rector. "Whether he was unhappy with his wife, or whether he felt his health declining, is more than I can say. You must remember that my informant was but a lad at the time of which I speak, and that when he talked to me about the subject sixty years afterwards he was a very old man, and his impressions were therefore more or less vague. But upon certain facts he was sufficiently positive; and amongst the circumstances he remembered most vividly are those of the story I am going to tell you.

"It seems that within a very few weeks of Matthew's death, his wife, Rebecca Haygarth, started on an expedition to the north, in the company of an uncle, to hear John Wesley preach on some very special occasion, and to assist at a love-feast. She was gone more than a fortnight; and during her absence Matthew Haygarth mounted his horse early one morning and rode away from Dewsdale.

"His household consisted of three maids, a

man, and the lad Andrew Hone, afterwards my sexton. Before departing on his journey Mr. Haygarth had said that he would not return till late the next evening, and had requested that only the man (whose name I forget) should sit up for him.

"He was punctiliously obeyed. The household, always of early habits, retired at nine, the accustomed hour; and the man-servant waited to receive his master, while the lad Andrew, who slept in the stables, sat up to keep his fellow-servant company.

"At ten o'clock Mr. Haygarth came home, gave his horse into the charge of the lad, took his candle from the man-servant, and walked straight upstairs, as if going to bed. The man-servant locked the doors, took his master the key, and then went to his own quarters. The boy remained up to feed and groom the horse, which had the appearance of having performed a hard day's work.

"He had nearly concluded this business when he was startled by the slamming of the back door opening into the court-yard, in which were the

stables and outhouses. Apprehending thieves, the boy opened the door of the stable and looked out, doubtless with considerable caution.

"It was broad moonlight, and he saw at a glance that the person who had opened the door was one who had a right to open it. Matthew Haygarth was crossing the court-yard as the lad peeped out. He wore a long black cloak, and his head drooped upon his breast, as if he had been in dejection. The lad—being, I suppose, inquisitive, after the manner of country lads—made no more ado, but left his unfinished work and crept stealthily after his master, who came straight to this churchyard,—indeed to this very spot on which we are now standing.

"On this spot the boy Andrew Hone became the secret witness of a strange scene. He saw an open grave close against the rails yonder, and he saw a little coffin lowered silently into that grave by the sexton of that time and a strange man, who afterwards went away in a mourning coach, which was in waiting at the gate, and in which doubtless the stranger and the little coffin had come.

"Before the man departed he assisted to fill up the grave; and when it was filled Matthew Haygarth gave money to both the men—gold it seemed to the lad Andrew, and several pieces to each person. The two men then departed, but Mr. Haygarth still lingered.

"As soon as he fancied himself alone, he knelt down beside the little grave, covered his face with his hands, and either wept or prayed, Andrew Hone could not tell which. If he wept, he wept silently.

"From that night, my sexton said, Matthew Haygarth faded visibly. Mistress Rebecca came home from her love-feast, and nursed and tended her husband with considerable kindness, though, so far as I can make out, she was at the best a stern woman. He died three weeks after the event which I have described, and was buried in that vault close to the little grave."

I thanked Mr. Wendover for his succinct narrative, and apologised for the trouble I had occasioned him.

"Do not speak of the trouble," he answered

kindly; "I am used to telling that story. I have heard it a great many times from poor old Andrew, and I have told it a great many times."

"The story has rather a legendary tone," I said; "I should have scarcely thought such a thing possible."

The rector shrugged his shoulders with a deprecating gesture.

"In our own day," he replied, "such an occurrence would be almost impossible; but you must remember that we are talking of the last century—a century in which I regret to say the clergy of the Church of England were sadly lax in the performance of their duties. The followers of Wesley and Whitefield could scarcely have multiplied as they did if the flocks had not been cruelly neglected by their proper shepherds. It was a period in which benefices were bestowed constantly on men obviously unfitted for the holy office—men who were gamblers and drunkards, patrons of cockpits, and in many cases open and shameless reprobates. In such an age almost anything was possible; and this midnight and

unhallowed interment may very well have taken place either with the consent or without the knowledge of the incumbent, who, I am told, bore no high character for piety or morality."

"And you say there is an entry in the register?"

"Yes, a careless scrawl, dated Sept. 19th, 1774, recording the burial of one Matthew Haygarth, aged four years, removed from the burial-ground attached to the parish church of Spotswold."

"Then it was a re-interment?"

"Evidently."

"And is Spotswold in this county?"

"Yes; it is a very small village, about fifty miles from here."

"And Matthew Haygarth died very soon after this event?"

"He did. He died very suddenly, with an awful suddenness, and died intestate. His widow was left the possessor of great wealth, which increased in the hands of her son John Haygarth, a very prudent and worthy gentleman, and a credit to the Church of which he was a member. He

only died very lately, I believe, and must therefore have attained a great age."

It is quite evident that Mr. Wendover had not seen the advertisement in the *Times*, and was ignorant of the fact that the accumulated wealth of the Haygarths and Caulfields is now waiting a claimant.

I asked permission to see the register containing the entry of the mysterious interment; and after the administration of a shilling to the clerk—a shilling at Dewsdale being equal to half-a-crown in London—the vestry cupboard was opened by that functionary, and the book I required was produced from a goodly pile of such mouldy brown leather-bound volumes.

The following is a copy of the entry:

"On Thursday last past, being y^e^ 19 Sep^tr^, A.D. 1774, was interr'd y^e^ bodie off onne Matthewe Haygarthe, ag'^d^ foure yeres, remoov'd fromm y^e^ Churcheyarde off S^t^. Marie, under y^e^ hil, Spotswolde, in this Co. Pade forr so doeing, sevven shill."

After having inspected the register, I asked

many further questions, but without eliciting much further information. So I expressed my thanks for the courtesy that had been shown me, and took my departure, not wishing to press the matter so closely as to render myself a nuisance to the worthy Wendover, and bearing in mind that it would be open to me to return at any future time.

And now I ask myself—and I ask the astute Sheldon—what is the meaning of this mysterious burial, and is it likely to have any bearing on the object of our search? These are questions for the consideration of the astute S.

I spent my evening in jotting down the events of the day, in the above free-and-easy fashion for my own guidance, and in a more precise and business-like style for my employer. I posted my letter before ten o'clock, the hour at which the London mail is made up, and then smoked my cigar in the empty streets, overshadowed by gaunt square stacks of building and tall black chimneys; and so back to my inn, where I took a glass of ale and another cigar, and then to bed, as the worthy Pepys might have concluded.

CHAPTER III.

MR. GOODGE'S WISDOM.

Oct. 5th. My dreams last night were haunted by the image of gray-eyed Molly, with her wild loose hair. She must needs have been a sweet creature; and how she came amongst those prim fishy-eyed men and women with absurd headgear is much more than I can understand. That she should mix herself up with Diana Paget, and play *rouge-et-noir* at Forêtdechêne in a tucked-up chintz gown and a quilted satin petticoat in my dreams last night—that I should meet her afterwards in the little stucco temple on the Belgian hills, and stab her to the heart, whereon she changed into Charlotte Halliday — is only in the nature of dreams, and therefore no subject for wonder.

On referring to Sheldon's letter I found that

the next people to be looked up were descendants of Brice the lawyer; so I devoted my breakfast-hour to the cultivation of an intimacy with the oldest of the waiters—a very antique specimen of his brotherhood, with a white stubble upon his chin and a tendency to confusion of mind in the matter of forks and spoons.

"Do you know, or have you ever known, an attorney of the name of Brice in this town?" I asked him.

He rubbed the white stubble contemplatively with his hand, and then gave his poor old head a dejected shake. I felt at once that I should get very little good out of *him*.

"No," he murmured despondently, "not that I can call to mind."

I should like to know what he *could* call to mind, piteous old meanderer!

"And yet you belong to Ullerton, I suppose?"

"Yes; and have belonged to it these seventy-five years, man and boy;" whereby no doubt the dreary confusion of the unhappy being's mind. Figurez donc, mon cher Qui-que-ce-soit, fifty-five

years or so of commercial breakfasts and dinners in such a place as Ullerton. Five-and-fifty years of steaks and chops; five-and-fifty years of ham-and-eggs, indifferently-buttered toasts, and perennial sixes of brandy-and-water! After rambling to and fro with spoons and forks, and while in progress of clearing my table, and dropping the different items of my breakfast-equipage, the poor soddened faded face of this dreary wanderer became suddenly illumined with a faint glimmer that was almost the light of reason.

"There were a Brice in Ullerton when I were a lad; I've heard father tell on him," he murmured slowly.

"An attorney?"

"Yes. He were a rare wild one, he were! It was when the Prince of Wales were Regent for his poor old mad father, as the saying is, and folks was wilder like in general in those times, and wore spencers—lawyer Brice wore a plum-coloured one."

Imagine then again, mon cher, an attorney in a plum-coloured spencer! Who, in these enlight-

cned days, would trust his business to such a practitioner? I perked up considerably, believing that my aged imbecile was going to be of real service to me.

"Yes, he were a rare wild one, he were," said my ancient friend with excitement; "I can remember him as well as if it was yesterday, at Tiverford races — there was races at Tiverford in those days, and gentlemen-jocks. Lawyer Brice rode his roan mare—Queen Charlotte they called her. But after that he went wrong, folks said —speckilated with some money, you see, that he didn't ought to have touched — and went to America, and died."

"Died in America, did he? Why the deuce couldn't he die in Ullerton? I should fancy it was a pleasanter place to die in than it is to live in. And how about his sons?"

"Lawyer Brice's sons?"

"Yes, of course."

My imbecile's lips expanded into a broad grin.

"Lawyer Brice never had no sons," he exclaimed, with a tone which seemed to express a

contemptuous pity for my ignorance; "he never married."

"Well, well; his brothers. He had brothers, I suppose?"

"Not as *I* ever heard tell on," answered my imbecile, relapsing into hopeless inanity.

It was clear that no further help was to be obtained from him. I went to the landlord—a brisk business-like individual of Transatlantic go-aheadism. From him I learned that there were no Brices in Ullerton, and never had been within the thirty years of his experience in that town. He gave me an Ullerton directory in confirmation of that fact—a neat little shilling volume, which I begged leave to keep for a quarter of an hour before returning it.

Brice was evidently a failure. I turned to the letter G, and looked up the name of Goodge. Goodge, Jonah, minister of Beulah Chapel, resided at No. 7 Waterhouse-lane—the lane in which I had seen the chapel.

I determined upon waiting on the worthy Goodge. He may be able to enlighten me as

to the name of the pastor who preached to the Wesleyan flock in the time of Rebecca Caulfield; and from the descendants of such pastor I may glean some straws and shreds of information. The pious Rebecca would have been likely to confide much to her spiritual director. The early Wesleyans had all the exaltation of the Quietists, and something of the lunatic fervour of the Convulsionists, who kicked and screamed themselves into epilepsy under the influence of the Unigenitus Bull. The pious Rebecca was no doubt an enthusiast.

I found No. 7 Waterhouse-lane. It is a neat little six-roomed house, with preternaturally green palings enclosing about sixty square feet of bright yellow gravel, adorned by a row of whitewashed shells. Some scarlet geraniums bloomed in pots of still more vivid scarlet; and the sight of those bright red blossoms recalled Philip Sheldon's garden at Bayswater, and that sweet girl by whose side I have walked its trim pathways.

But business is business; and if I am ever to

sue for my Charlotte's hand, I must present myself before her as the winner of the three thousand. Remembering this, I lifted Mr. Goodge's knocker, and presently found myself in conversation with that gentleman.

Whether unordained piety has a natural tendency to become greasy of aspect, and whether, among the many miracles vouchsafed to the amiable and really great Wesley, he received for his disciples of all time to come the gift of a miraculous straightness and lankiness of hair, I know not; but I do know that every Methodist parson I have had the honour to know has been of one pattern, and that Mr. Goodge is no exception to the rule.

I am bound to record that I found him a very civil person, quite willing to afford me any help in his power, and far more practical and business-like than the rector of Dewsdale.

It seems that the gift of tongues descended on the Goodges during the lifetime of John Wesley himself, and during the earlier part of that teacher's career. It was a Goodge who preached

in the draper's warehouse, and it was the edifying discourse of a Goodge which developed the piety of Miss Rebecca Caulfield, afterwards Mrs. Haygarth.

"That Goodge was my great-uncle," said the courteous Jonah, "and there was no one in Ullerton better acquainted with Rebecca Caulfield. I've heard my grandmother talk of her many a time. She used to send him poultry and garden-stuff from her house at Dewsdale, and at his instigation she contributed handsomely to the erection of the chapel in which it is my privilege to preach."

I felt that I had struck upon a vein of gold. Here was a sharp-witted, middle-aged man—not an ancient mariner, or a meandering imbecile—who could remember the talk of a grandmother who had known Matthew Haygarth's wife. And this visit to Mr. Goodge was my own idea, not prompted by the far-seeing Sheldon. I felt myself advancing in the insidious arts of a private inquirer.

"I am employed in the prosecution of a business which has a *remote* relation to the Haygarth

family history," I said; "and if you can afford me any information on that subject I should be extremely obliged."

I emphasised the adjective "remote," and felt myself, in my humble way, a Talleyrand.

"What kind of information do you require?" asked Mr. Goodge thoughtfully.

"Any information respecting Matthew Haygarth or his wife."

Mr. Goodge became profoundly meditative after this.

"I am not given to act unadvisedly," he began—and I felt that I was in for a little professional discourse; "the creatures of impulse are the children of Satan, the babes of Lucifer, the infants of Beelzebub. I take counsel in the silence of the night, and wait the whispers of wisdom in the waking hours of darkness. You must allow me time to ponder this business in my heart and to be still."

I told Mr. Goodge that I would willingly await his own time for affording me any information in his power to give.

"That is pleasant," said the pastor blandly: "the worldly are apt to rush blindly through life, as the roaring lion rushes through the forest. I am not one of those rushing worldlings. I presume, by the way, that such information as I may afford is likely to become a source of pecuniary profit to your employer."

I began to see that my friend Goodge and the rector of Dewsdale were very different kind of people, and that I must play my cards accordingly.

"That will depend upon the nature of your information," I replied diplomatically; "it may be worth something to us, or it may be worthless."

"And in case it should be worth something?"

"In that case my employer would be glad to remunerate the person from whom he obtained it."

Mr. Goodge again became meditative.

"It was the habit of the sainted Wesley to take counsel from the Scriptures," he said presently; "if you will call again to-morrow, young man, I shall have taken counsel, and may be able to entreat with you."

I did not much relish being addressed as "young man," even by such a shining light as the Rev. Jonah Goodge. But as I wanted the Rev. Jonah's aid, I submitted with a tolerable grace to his patriarchal familiarity, and bade him good-morning, after promising to call again the following day. I returned to my inn and wrote to Sheldon in time for the afternoon mail, recounting my interview with Mr. Goodge, and asking how far I should be authorised to remunerate that gentleman, or to pledge myself to remunerate him for such information as he might have to dispose of.

Oct. 6th. A letter from Sheldon.

"Dear Hawkehurst,—There may be something very important behind that mysterious burial at Dewsdale. Go without delay to Spotswold; examine registers, tombstones, &c.; hunt up oldest inhabitant or inhabitants, from whom you may be able to discover whether any Haygarth or Haygarths ever lived there, and all that is known respecting such Haygarth or Haygarths.

You have got a clue to *something*. Follow it up till it breaks off short, as such clues often do, or till you find it is only leading you on a wild-goose chase. The Dewsdale business is worth investigation. Mem.: how about descendants of lawyer Brice?—Yours truly, G. S.

"G.'s Inn, Oct. 5th."

Before starting for Spotswold it was necessary for me to see Mr. Goodge. I found that gentleman in a pious and yet business-like frame of mind. He had taken counsel from the Scriptures, like the founder of his sect; but I fancy with rather less spiritual aspirations.

"The text upon which the lot fell was the 12th verse of the 9th chapter in the Book of Proverbs, 'If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself,'" he said solemnly; "whereby I perceive that I shall not be justified in parting with that which you seek without fitting recompense. I ask you therefore, young man, what you are prepared to give.'

The Rev. Jonah's tone could scarcely have

been more lofty, or his manner more patronising, if he had been Saul and I the humble David; but a man who is trying to earn three thousand pounds must put up with a great deal. Finding that the minister was prepared to play the huckster, I employed no further ceremony.

"The price must of course depend on the quality of the article you have to sell," I said; "I must know that before I can propose terms."

"Suppose my information took the form of letters?"

"Letters from whom—to whom?"

"From Mrs. Rebecca Haygarth to my great-uncle, Samson Goodge."

"How many of such letters have you to sell?"

I put it very plainly; but the Rev. Jonah's susceptibilities were not of the keenest order. He did not wince.

"Say forty odd letters."

I pricked up my ears; and it needed all my diplomacy to enable me to conceal my sense of triumph. Forty odd letters! There must be an enormous amount of information in forty odd

letters; unless the woman wrote the direst twaddle ever penned by a feminine correspondent.

"Over what period do the dates of these letters extend?" I asked.

"Over about seven years; from 1769 to 1776."

Four years prior to the marriage with our friend Matthew; three years after the marriage.

"Are they tolerably long letters, or mere scrawls?"

"They were written in a period when nobody wrote short letters," answered Mr. Goodge sententiously,—"the period of Bath post and dear postage. The greater number of the epistles cover three sides of a sheet of letter-paper; and Mrs. Rebecca's caligraphy was small and neat."

"Good!" I exclaimed. "I suppose it is no use my asking you to let me see one of these letters before striking a bargain—eh, Mr. Goodge?"

"Well, I think not," answered the oily old hypocrite. "I have taken counsel, and I will abide by the light that has been shown me. 'If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself;'

such are the words of inspiration. No, I think not."

"And what do you ask for the forty odd letters?"

"Twenty pounds."

"A stiff sum, Mr. Goodge, for forty sheets of old letter-paper!"

"But if they were not likely to be valuable, you would scarcely happen to want them," answered the minister. "I have taken counsel, young man."

"And those are your lowest terms?"

"I cannot accept sixpence less. It is not in me to go from my word. As Jacob served Laban seven years, and again another seven years, having promised, so do I abide by my bond. Having said twenty pounds, young man, Heaven forbid that I should take so much as twenty pence less than those twenty pounds!"

The solemn unction with which he pronounced this twaddle is beyond description. The pretence of conscientious feeling which he contrived to infuse into his sordid bargain-driving might have

lone honour to Molière's Tartuffe. Seeing that he was determined to stick to his terms, I departed. I telegraphed to Sheldon for instructions as to whether I was to give Goodge the money he asked, and then went back to my inn, where I devoted myself for the next ten minutes to the study of a railway time-table, with a view to finding the best route to Spotswold.

After a close perusal of bewildering strings of proper names and dazzling columns of figures, I found a place called Black Harbour, "for Wisborough, Spotswold, and Chilton." A train left Ullerton for Black Harbour at six o'clock in the afternoon, and was due at the latter place at 8.40.

This gave me an interval of some hours in which I could do nothing, unless I received a telegram from Sheldon. The chance of a reply from him kept me a prisoner in the coffee-room of the Swan Inn, where I read almost every line in the local and London newspapers pending the arrival of the despatch, which came at last.

"Tell Goodge he shall have the sum asked,

and get the letters at once. Money by to-night's post."

This was Sheldon's message: sharp and short, and within the eighteenpenny limit. Acting upon this telegram I returned to the abode of Mr. Goodge, told him his terms were to be complied with, showed him the telegram, at his request, and asked for the letters.

I ought to have known my reverend friend better than to imagine he would part with those ancient documents except for money upon the counter.

He smiled a smile which might have illuminated the visage of Machiavelli.

"The letters have kept a long time, young man," he said, after having studied the telegram as closely as if it had been written in Punic; "and lo you, they are in nowise the worse for keeping: so they will keep yet longer. 'If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself.' You can come for the letters to-morrow, and bring the money with you. Say at 11 A.M."

I put on my hat and bade my friend good-

day. I have often been tempted to throw things at people, and have withheld my hand; but I never felt Satan so strong upon me as at that moment, and I very much fear that if I had had anything in the way of a kitchen-poker or a carving-knife about me, I should have flung that missile at the patriarchal head of my saintly Jonah. As it was, I bade him good-day and returned to the Swan, where I took a hurried repast and started for the station, carrying a light carpet-bag with me, as I was not likely to return till the following night, at the earliest.

I arrived at the station ten minutes before the starting of the train, and had to endure ten minutes of that weariness called waiting. I exhausted the interest of all the advertisements on the station walls, found out how I could have my furniture removed with the utmost convenience —supposing myself to possess furniture; discovered where I ought to buy a dinner-service, and the most agreeable kind of blind to screen my windows in sunny weather. I was still lingering over the description of this new invention in

blinds, when a great bell set up a sudden clanging, and the down train from London came thundering into the station.

This was also the train for Black Harbour. There were a good many passengers going northwards, a good many alighting at Ullerton; and in the hurry and confusion I had some difficulty in finding a place in a second-class carriage, the passengers therein blocking up the windows with that unamiable exclusiveness peculiar to railway travellers. I found a place at last, however; but in hurrying from carriage to carriage I was startled by an occurrence which I have since pondered very seriously.

I ran bolt against my respected friend and patron Horatio Paget.

We had only time to recognise each other with exclamations of mutual surprise when the clanging bell rang again, and I was obliged to scuffle into my seat. A moment's delay would have caused me to be left behind. And to have remained behind would have been very awkward for me; as the Captain would undoubtedly have questioned

me as to my business in Ullerton. Was I not supposed to be at Dorking, enjoying the hospitality of an aged aunt?

It would have been unlucky to lose that train.

But what "makes" the gallant Captain in Ullerton? That is a question which I deliberated as the train carried me towards Black Harbour.

Sheldon warned me of the necessity for secrecy, and I have been as secret as the grave. It is therefore next to an impossibility that Horatio Paget can have any idea of the business I am engaged in. He is the very man of all others to try and supersede me if he had an inkling of my plans; but I am convinced he can have no such inkling.

And yet the advertisement of the Haygarth property in the *Times* was as open to the notice of all the world as it was open to the notice of George Sheldon. What if my patron should have been struck by the same advertisement, and should have come to Ullerton on the same business?

It is possible, but it is not likely. When I left

town the Captain was engaged in Philip Sheldon's affairs. He has no doubt come to Ullerton on Philip Sheldon's business. The town, which seems an abomination of desolation to a man who is accustomed to London and Paris, is nevertheless a commercial centre; and the stockbroker's schemes may involve the simple Ullertonians, as well as the more experienced children of the metropolis.

Having thought the business out thus, I gave myself no further trouble about the unexpected appearance of my friend and benefactor.

At Black Harbour I found a coach, which carried me to Spotswold, whither I travelled in a cramped and painful position as regards my legs, and with a pervading sensation which was like a determination of luggage to the brain, so close to my oppressed head was the heavily-laden roof of the vehicle. It was pitch dark when I and two fellow-passengers of agricultural aspect were turned out of the coach at Spotswold, which in the gloom of night appeared to consist of half-a-dozen houses shut in from the road by ghastly white palings, a grim looming church, and a low-

roofed inn with a feeble light glimmering athwart a red stuff curtain.

At this inn I was fain to take up my abode for the night, and was conducted to a little white-washed bed-chamber, draperied with scanty dimity and smelling of apples—the humblest, commonest cottage chamber, but clean and decent, and with a certain countryfied aspect which was pleasing to me. I fancied myself the host of such an inn, with Charlotte for my wife; and it seemed to me that it would be nice to live in that remote and unknown village, "the world forgetting, by the world forgot." I beguiled myself by such foolish fancies,—I, who have been reared amidst the clamour and riot of the Strand!

Should I be happy with that dear girl if she were mine? Alas! I doubt it. A man who has led a disreputable life up to the age of seven-and-twenty is very likely to have lost all capacity for such pure and perfect happiness as that which good men find in the tranquil haven of a home.

Should I not hear the rattle of the billiard-balls, or the voice of the *croupier* calling the main,

as I sat by my quiet fireside? Should I not yearn for the glitter and confusion of West-end dancing-rooms, or the mad excitement of the ring, while my innocent young wife was sitting by my side and asking me to look at the blue eyes of my first-born?

No; Charlotte is not for me. There must be always the two classes—the sheep and the goats; and my lot has been cast among the goats.

And yet there are some people who laugh to scorn the doctrines of Calvin, and say there is no such thing as predestination.

Is there not predestination? Was not I predestined to be born in a gaol and reared in a gutter, educated among swindlers and scoundrels, fed upon stolen victuals, and clad in garments never to be paid for? Did no Eumenides preside over the birth of Richard Savage, so set apart for misery that the laws of nature were reversed, and even his mother hated him? Did no dismal fatality follow the footsteps of Chatterton? Has no mysterious ban been laid upon the men who have been called Dukes of Buckingham?

What foolish lamentations am I scribbling in this diary, which is intended to be only the baldest record of events! It is so natural to mankind to complain that, having no ear in which to utter his discontent, a man is fain to resort to pen and ink.

I devoted my evening to conversation with the landlord and his wife, but found that the name of Haygarth was as strange to them as if it had been taken from an inscription in the tomb of the Pharaohs. I inquired about the few inhabitants of the village, and ascertained that the oldest man in the place is the sexton, native-born, and supposed by mine host never to have travelled twenty miles from his birthplace. His name is Peter Drabbles. What extraordinary names that class of people contrive to have! My first business to-morrow morning will be to find my friend Drabbles—another ancient mariner, no doubt—and to examine the parish registers.

Oct. 7th. A misty morning, and a perpetual drizzle — to say nothing of a damp, penetrating cold, which creeps through the thickest overcoat, and chills one to the bone. I do not think Spots-

wold can have much brightness or prettiness even on the fairest summer morning that ever beautified the earth. I know that, seen as I see it to-day, the place is the very archetype of all that is darksome, dull, desolate, dismal, and dreary. (How odd, by the way, that all that family of epithets should have the same initial!) A wide stretch of moorland lies around and about the little village, which crouches in a hollow, like some poor dejected animal that seeks to shelter itself from the bitter blast. On the edge of the moorland, and above the straggling cottages and the little inn, rises the massive square tower of an old church, so far out of proportion to the pitiful cluster of houses, that I imagine it must be the remnant of some monastic settlement.

Towards this church I made my way, under the dispiriting drip, drip of the rain, and accompanied by a feeble old man, who is sexton, clerk, gravedigger, and anything or everything of an official nature.

We went into the church after my ancient mariner No. 2 had fumbled a good deal with a

bunch of ghostly-looking keys. The door opened with a dismal scroop, and shut with an appalling bang. Grim and dark as the church is without, it is grimmer and darker within, and damp and vault-like, *à fortiori ibidem*. There are all the mysterious cupboards and corners peculiar to such edifices; an organ-loft, from which weird noises issue at every opening or closing of a door; a vaulted roof, which echoes one's footsteps with a moan, as of some outraged spirit hovering in empty space, and ejaculating piteously, "Another impious intruder after the sacramental plate! another plebeian sole trampling on the brasses of the De Montacutes, lords of the manor!"

The vestry is, if anything, more ghostly than the general run of vestries; but the business mind is compelled to waive all considerations of a supernatural character. For the moment there flashed across my brain the shadows of all the Christmas stories I had ever read or heard concerning vestries; the phantom bridal, in which the bride's beautiful white hand changed to the bony fingers of a skeleton as she signed the register; the un-

earthly christening, in which all at once, after the ceremony having been conducted with the utmost respectability, to the edification of the unauthorised intruder hiding behind a pillar, the godfathers and godmothers, nurse and baby, priest and clerk, became in a moment dilapidated corpses; whereon, the appalled intruder fell prone at the foot of his pillar, there to be discovered the next morning by his friends and the public generally, with his hair blanched to an awful whiteness, or his noble intellect degraded to idiocy.

For a moment, the memory of about a hundred Christmas stories was too much for me—so weird of aspect and earthy of atmosphere was the vestry at Spotswold. And then, "being gone" the shadows of the Christmas stories, I was a man and a lawyer's clerk again, and set myself assiduously to search the registers and interrogate my ancient.

I found that individual a creature of mental fogginess compared with whom my oldest inhabitant of Ullerton would have been a Pitt, Earl of Chatham. But I questioned and cross-questioned him until I had in a manner turned his poor old

wits the seamy side without, and had discovered, first, that he had never known anyone called Haygarth in the whole course of those seventy-five years' vegetation which politeness compelled me to speak of as his "life;" secondly, that he had never known anyone who knew a Haygarth; thirdly, that he was intimately acquainted with every creature in the village, and that he knew that no one of the inhabitants could give me the smallest shred of such information as I required.

Having extorted so much as this from my ancient with unutterable expenditure of time and trouble, I next set to work upon the registers.

If the ink manufactured in the present century is of no more durable nature than that abominable fluid employed in the penmanship of a hundred years ago, I profoundly pity the generations that are to come after us. The registers of Spotswold might puzzle a Bunsen. However, bearing in mind the incontrovertible fact that three thousand pounds is a very agreeable sum of money, I stuck to my work for upwards of two hours, and obtained as a result the following entries:

1. Matthew Haygarthe, aged foure yeares, berrid in this churcheyarde, over against y^e^ tombe off M^rs^. Marttha Stileman, a bout 10 fete fromm y^e^ olde yue tre. Febevarie 6^th^, 1753.

2. Mary Haygarthe, aged twentie sevene yeers, berrid under y^e^ yue tree, Nov. 21, 1754.

After copying these two entries, I went out into the churchyard to look for Mary Haygarth's grave.

Under a fine old yew—which had been old a hundred years ago, it seems—I found huddled amongst other head-stones one so incrusted with moss, that it was only after scraping the parasite verdure from the stone with my pen-knife that I was able to discover the letters that had been cut upon it.

I found at last a brief inscription:

Here lieth y^e^ body of
MARY HAYGARTH, aged 27.
Born 1727. Died 1754.

This stone has been set up by one who sorroweth without hope of consolation.

A strange epitaph: no scrap of Latin, no text from Scripture, no conventional testimony to the virtues and accomplishments of the departed, no word to tell whether the dead woman had been maid, wife, or widow. It was the most provoking inscription for a lawyer or a genealogist, but such as might have pleased a poet.

I fancy this Mary Haygarth must have been some quiet creature, with very few friends to sorrow for her loss. Perhaps only that one person who sorrowed without hope of consolation.

Such a tombstone might have been set above the grave of that simple maid who dwelt "beside the banks of Dove."

This is the uttermost that my patience or ingenuity can do for me at Spotswold. I have exhausted every possibility of obtaining further information. So, having written and posted my report to Sheldon, I have no more to do but to return to Ullerton. I take back with me nothing but the copy of the two entries in the register of burials. Who this Matthew Haygarth or this

Mary Haygarth was, and how related to *the* Matthew, is an enigma not to be solved at Spotswold.

Here the story of the Haygarths ends with the grave under the yew-tree.

Book the Fifth.

RELICS OF THE DEAD.

CHAPTER I.

BETRAYED BY A BLOTTING-PAD.

At an early hour upon the day on which Valentine Hawkehurst telegraphed to his employer, Philip Sheldon presented himself again at the dingy door of the office in Gray's Inn.

The dingy door was opened by the still more dingy boy; and Mr. Sheldon the elder—who lived in a state of chronic hurry, and had a hansom cab in attendance upon him at almost every step of his progress through life—was aggravated by the discovery that his brother was out.

"Out!" he repeated, with supreme disgust; "he always *is* out, I think. Where is he to be found?"

The boy replied that his master would be back in half an hour, if Mr. Sheldon would like to wait.

"Like to wait!" cried the stockbroker;

"when will lawyers' clerks have sense enough to know that nobody on this earth ever *liked* to wait? Where's your master gone?"

"I think he's just slipped round into Holborn, sir," the boy replied with some slight hesitation. He was very well aware that George had secrets from his brother, and that it was not judicious to be too free in his communications to the elder gentleman. But the black eyes and white teeth of the stockbroker seemed very awful to him; and if Philip chose to question him, he must needs answer the truth, not having been provided by his master with any convenient falsehood in case of inquiry.

"What part of Holborn?" asked Philip sharply.

"I did hear tell as it was the telegraph-office."

"Good!" exclaimed Mr. Sheldon; and then he dashed downstairs, leaving the lad on the threshold of the door staring after him with eyes of wonder.

The telegraph-office meant business; and any business of his brother's was a matter of interest

to Mr. Sheldon at this particular period. He had meditated the meaning of George's triumphant smile in the secluded calm of his own office; and the longer he had meditated, the more deeply rooted had become his conviction that his brother was engaged in some very deep and very profitable scheme, the nature of which it was his bounden duty to discover.

Impressed by this idea, Mr. Sheldon returned to the hansom cab which was waiting for him at the end of Warwick-court, and made his way to the telegraph-office. The ostensible motive of his call in Gray's Inn was sufficient excuse for this following up of his brother's footsteps. It was one of those waifs and strays of rather disreputable business which the elder man sometimes threw in the way of the younger.

As the wheel of the hansom ground against the curbstone in front of the telegraph-office, the figure of George Sheldon vanished in a little court to the left of that establishment. Instead of pursuing this receding figure, Philip Sheldon walked straight into the office.

It was empty. There was no one in any of the shaded compartments so painfully suggestive of pecuniary distress and the stealthy hypothecation of portable property. A sound of rattling and bumping in an inner office betrayed the neighbourhood of a clerk; but in the office Mr. Sheldon was alone.

Upon the blotting-pad on the counter of the central partition the stockbroker perceived one great blot of ink, still moist. He laid the tip of his square forefinger upon it, to assure himself of that fact, and then set himself deliberately to scrutinise the blotting-paper. He was a man who seldom hesitated. His greatest coups on the money-market had been in a great measure the result of this faculty of prompt decision. To-day he possessed himself of the blotting-pad, and examined the half-formed syllables stamped upon it with as much coolness and self-possession as if he had been seated in his own office reading his own newspaper. A man given to hesitation would have looked to the right and the left and watched for his opportunity—and lost it. Philip Sheldon

knew better than to waste his chances by needless precaution; and he made himself master of all the intelligence the blotting-pad could afford him before the clerk emerged from the inner den where the rattling and stamping was going forward.

"I thought as much," muttered the stock-broker, as he recognised traces of his brother's sprawling penmanship upon the pad. The message had been written with a heavy hand and a spongy quill pen, and had left a tolerably clear impression of its contents on the blotting-paper.

Here and there the words stood out bold and clear; here and there, again, there was only one decipherable letter amongst a few broken hieroglyphics. Mr. Sheldon was accustomed to the examination of very illegible documents, and he was able to master the substance of that random impression. If he could not decipher the whole, he made out sufficient for his purpose. Money was to be offered to a man called Goodge for certain letters. He knew his brother's affairs well enough to know that these letters for which money

was to be offered must needs be letters of importance in some search for an heir-at-law. So far all was clear and simple; but beyond this point he found himself at fault. Where was this Goodge to be found? and who was the person that was to offer him money for the letters? The names and address, which had been written first, had left no impression on the blotting-pad, or an impression so faint as to be useless for any practical purpose.

Mr. Sheldon put down the pad and lingered by the door of the office deliberating, when the rattling and hammering came to an abrupt termination, and the clerk emerged from the interior den.

"O," he exclaimed, "it's all right. Your message shall go directly."

The stockbroker, whose face was half averted from the clerk, and who stood between that functionary and the light from the open doorway, at once comprehended the error that had arisen. The clerk had mistaken him for his brother.

"I'm not quite clear as to whether I gave the right address," he said promptly, with his face still averted, and his attention apparently occupied

by a paper in his hand. "Just see how I wrote it, there's a good fellow."

The clerk withdrew for a few minutes, and returned with the message in his hand.

"From George Sheldon to Valentine Hawkehurst, Black Swan Inn, Ullerton," he read aloud from the document.

"All right, and thanks," cried the stockbroker.

He gave one momentary glance at the clerk, and had just time to see that individual's look of bewilderment as some difference in his voice and person from the voice and person of the black-whiskered man who had just left the office dawned upon his troubled senses. After that one glance Mr. Sheldon darted across the pavement, sprang into his cab, and called to the driver, "Literary Institution, Burton-street, as fast as you can go."

"I'll try my luck in the second column of the *Times*," he said to himself. "If George's scheme is what I take it to be, I shall get some clue to it there." He took a little oblong memorandum-book from his pocket, and looked at his memo-

randa of the past week. Among those careless jottings he found one memorandum scrawled in pencil, amongst notes and addresses in ink, "*Haygarth—intestate. G. S. ; to see after.*"

"That's it," he exclaimed; "Haygarth—intestate; Valentine Hawkehurst *not* at Dorking, but working for my brother; Goodge—letters to be paid for. It's all like the bits of mosaic that those antiquarian fellows are always finding in the ruins of Somebody's Baths; a few handfuls of coloured chips that look like rubbish, and can yet be patched into a perfect geometric design. I'll hunt up a file of the *Times* at the Burton Institution, and find out this Haygarth, if he is to be found there."

The Burton Institution was a somewhat dingy temple, devoted to the interests of science and literature, and next door to some baths that were very popular among the denizens of Bloomsbury. People in quest of the Baths were apt to ascend the classic flight of steps leading to the Institution, when they should have descended to a lowlier threshold lurking modestly by the side of that

edifice. The Baths and the Institution had both been familiar to Mr. Sheldon in that period of probation which he had spent in Fitzgeorge-street. He was sufficiently acquainted with the librarian of the Institution to go in and out uninterrogated, and to make any use he pleased of the reading-room. He went in to-day, asked to see the latest bound volumes of the *Times* and the latest file of unbound papers, and began his investigation, working backwards. Rapidly and dexterously as he turned the big leaves of the journals, the investigation occupied nearly three-quarters of an hour; but at the expiration of that time he had alighted on the advertisement published in the March of the preceding year.

He gave a very low whistle—a kind of phantom whistle — as he read this advertisement. "John Haygarth! a hundred thousand pounds."

The fortune for which a claimant was lacking amounted to a hundred thousand pounds! Mr. Sheldon knew commercial despots who counted their wealth by millions, and whose fiat could sway the exchanges of Europe; but a hundred

thousand pounds seemed to him a very nice thing nevertheless, and he was ready to dispute the prize the anticipation whereof had rendered his brother so triumphant.

"He rejected me as a coadjutor," he thought, as he went back to his cab after having copied the advertisement; "he shall have me as an antagonist."

"Omega-street, Chelsea, next call," he cried to the driver; and was soon beyond the confines of Bloomsbury, and rattling away towards the borderland of Belgravia. He had completed his search of the newspapers at ten minutes past twelve, and at twenty minutes to one he presented himself at the lodging-house in Omega-street, where he found Captain Paget, in whose "promoting" business there happened to be a lull just now. With this gentleman he had a long interview; and the result of that interview was the departure of the Captain by the two-o'clock express for Ullerton. Thus had it happened that Valentine Hawkehurst and his patron encountered each other on the platform of Ullerton station.

CHAPTER II.

VALENTINE INVOKES THE PHANTOMS OF THE PAST.

Oct. 7th, Midnight. I was so fortunate as to get away from Spotswold this morning very soon after the completion of my researches in the vestry, and at five o'clock in the afternoon I found myself once more in the streets of Ullerton. Coming home in the train, I meditated seriously upon the unexpected appearance of Horatio Paget at the head-quarters of this Haygarthian investigation; and the more I considered that fact, the more I felt inclined to doubt my patron's motives, and to fear his interference. Can his presence in Ullerton have any relation to the business that has brought me here? That is the question which I asked myself a hundred times during my journey from Spotswold; that is the question which I ask myself still.

I have no doubt I give myself unnecessary trouble; but I know that old man's Machiavellian cleverness only too well; and I am inclined to look with suspicion upon every action of his. My first business on returning to this house was to ascertain whether anyone bearing his name, or answering to my description of him, had arrived during my absence. I was relieved by finding that no stranger whatever had put up at the inn since the previous forenoon. Who may have used the coffee-room is another question, not to be so easily set at rest. In the evening a great many people come in and go out; and my friend and patron may have taken his favourite brandy-and-soda, skimmed his newspaper, and picked up whatever information was to be obtained as to *my* movements without attracting any particular attention.

In the words of the immortal lessee of the Globe Theatre, "Why I should fear I know not . . . and yet I feel I fear!"

I found a registered letter from George Sheldon, enclosing twenty pounds in notes, and fur-

nished therewith I went straight to my friend Jonah, whom I found engaged in the agreeable occupation of taking tea. I showed him the money; but my estimate of the reverend gentleman's honour being of a very limited nature, I took care not to give it to him till he had produced the letters. On finding that I was really prepared to give him his price, he went to an old-fashioned bureau, and opened one of those secret recesses which cannot for three minutes remain a secret to any investigator possessed of a tolerably accurate eye or a three-foot rule. From this hiding-place —which he evidently considered a triumph of mechanical art, worthy the cabinet of a d'Argenson or a Fouché—he produced a packet of faded yellow letters, about which there lurked a faint odour of dried rose-leaves and lavender, which seemed the very perfume of the past.

When my reverend friend had laid the packet on the table within reach of my hand, and not till then, I gave him the bank-notes. His fat old fingers closed upon them greedily, and his fishy old eyes were illumined by a faint glimmer which

I believe nothing but bank-notes could have kindled in them.

After having assured himself that they were genuine acknowledgments of indebtedness on the part of the old lady in Threadneedle-street, and not the base simulacra of Birmingham at five-and-twenty shillings a dozen—thirteen as twelve—Mr. Goodge obligingly consented to sign a simple form of receipt which I had drawn up for the satisfaction of my principal.

"I think you said there were forty-odd letters," I remarked, before I proceeded to count the documents in the presence of Mr. Goodge.

That gentleman looked at me with an air of astonishment, which, had I not known him to be the most consummate of hypocrites, would have seemed to me simplicity itself.

"I said from thirty to forty," he exclaimed; "I never said there were forty-odd letters."

I looked at him and he looked at me. His face told me plainly enough that he was trying to deceive me, and my face told him plainly enough that he had no chance of succeeding in

that attempt. Whether he was keeping back some of the letters with a view to extorting more money from me hereafter, or whether he was keeping them with the idea of making a better bargain with somebody else, I could not tell; but of the main fact I was certain—he had cheated me.

I untied the red tape which held the letters together. Yes, there was a piece of circumstantial evidence which might have helped to convict my friend had he been on his trial in a criminal court. The red tape bore the mark of the place in which it had been tied for half-a-century; and a little way within this mark the trace of a very recent tying. Some of the letters had been extracted, and the tape had been tied anew.

I had no doubt that this had been done while my negotiation with Mr. Goodge had been pending. What was I to do? Refuse the letters, and demand to have my principal's money returned to me? I knew my friend well enough to know that such a proceeding would be about as useless as it would be to request the ocean to restore a cup of

water that had been poured into it. The letters he had given me might or might not afford some slight link in the chain I was trying to put together; and the letters withheld from me might be more or less valuable than those given to me. In any case the transaction was altogether a speculative one; and George Sheldon's money was hazarded as completely as if it had been put upon an outsider for the Derby.

Before bidding him a polite farewell, I was determined to make Mr. Goodge thoroughly aware that he had not taken me in.

"You said there were more than forty letters," I told him; "I remember the phrase 'forty-odd,' which is a colloquialism one would scarcely look for in Tillotson or in John Wesley, who cherished a prejudice in favour of scholarship which does not distinguish all his followers. You said there were forty-odd letters, and you have removed some of them from the packet. I am quite aware that I have no legal remedy against you, as our contract was a verbal one, made without witnesses; so I must be content with what I get; but I do not

wish you to flatter yourself with the notion that you have hoodwinked a lawyer's clerk. You are not clever enough to do that, Mr. Goodge, though you are knave enough to cheat every attorney in the Law List."

"Young man, are you aware—?"

"As I have suffered by the absence of any witness to our negotiation, I may as well profit by the absence of any witness to our interview. You are a cheat and a trickster, Mr. Goodge, and I have the honour to wish you good afternoon!"

"Go forth, young man," cried the infuriated Jonah, whose fat round face became beet-root colour with rage, and who involuntarily extended his hand to the poker—for the purpose of defence and not defiance, I believe. "Go forth, young man, I say unto you, as Abimelech said unto Jedediah, go forth."

I am not quite clear as to the two scriptural proper names with which the Rev. Jonah embellished his discourse on this occasion; but I know that sort of man always has a leaning to the Abimelechs and Jedediahs of biblical history; solely,

I believe, because the names have a sonorous roll with them that is pleasant in the mouth of the charlatan.

As I was in the act of going forth—quite at my leisure; for I had no fear of the clerical poker—my eye happened to alight on a small side-table, covered with a chessboard-patterned cloth in gaudy colours, and adorned with some of those sombre volumes which seem like an outward evidence of the sober piety of their possessor. Among the sombre volumes lay something which savoured of another hemisphere than that to which those brown leather-bound books belonged. It was a glove—a gentleman's glove, of pale lavender kid; small in size for a masculine glove, and bearing upon it the evidence of the cleaner's art. Such might be the glove of an exiled Brummel, but could never have incased the squat paw of a Jonah Goodge. It was as if the *point d'Alençon* ruffle of Chesterfield had been dropped in the study of John Wesley.

In a moment there flashed into my mind an idea which has haunted me ever since. That glove

had belonged to my respected patron, Horatio Paget, and it was for his benefit the letters had been abstracted from the packet. He had been with Jonah Goodge in the course of that day, and had bought him over to cheat me.

And then I was obliged to go back to the old question, Was it possible that the Captain could have any inkling of my business? Who could have told him? Who could have betrayed a secret which was known only to George Sheldon and myself?

After all, are there not other people than Horatio Paget who wear cleaned lavender gloves? But it always has been a habit with the Captain to leave one loose glove behind him; and I daresay it was the recollection of this which suggested the idea of his interference in the Goodge business.

I devoted my evening to the perusal of Mrs. Rebecca Haygarth's letters. The pale ink, the quaint cramped hand, the old-fashioned abbreviations and very doubtful orthography, rendered the task laborious; but I stuck to my work bravely,

and the old clock in the market-place struck two as I began the last letter. As I get deeper into this business I find my interest in it growing day by day; an interest *sui generis*, apart from all prospect of gain—apart even from the consideration that by means of this investigation I am obtaining a living which is earned *almost* honestly; for if I tell an occasional falsehood or act an occasional hypocrisy, I am no worse than a secretary of legation or an Old Bailey barrister.

The pleasure which I now take in the progress of this research is a pleasure that is new to me; it is the stimulus which makes a breakneck gallop across dreary fields gridironed with dykes and stone walls so delicious to the sportsman; it is the stimulus which makes the task of the mathematician sweet to him when he devotes laborious days to the solution of an abstruse problem; it is the stimulus that sustains the Indian trapper against all the miseries of cold and hunger, foul weather, and aching limbs; it is the fever of the chase,—that inextinguishable fire which,

once lighted in the human breast, is not to be quenched until the hunt is ended.

I should like to earn three thousand pounds; but if I were to be none the richer for my trouble, I think, now that I am so deeply involved in this business, I should still go on. I want to fathom the mystery of that midnight interment at Dewsdale; I want to know the story of that Mary Haygarth who lies under the old yew-tree at Spotswold, and for whose loss some one sorrowed without hope of consolation.

Was that a widower's commonplace, I wonder, and did the unknown mourner console himself ultimately with a new wife? Who knows? as my Italian friends say when they discuss the future of France. Shall I ever penetrate that mystery of the past? My task seems to me almost as hopeless as if George Sheldon had set me to hunt up the descendants of King Solomon's ninety-ninth wife. A hundred years ago seems as far away, for all practical purposes, as if it were on the other side of the flood.

The letters are worth very little. They are

prim and measured epistles, and they relate much more to spiritual matters than to temporal business. Mrs. Rebecca seems to have been so much concerned for the health of her soul that she had very little leisure to think of anything so insignificant as the bodies of other people. The letters are filled with discourses upon her own state of mind; and the tone of them reveals not a little of that pride whose character it is to simulate humility. Mrs. Rebecca is always casting ashes on her head; but she takes care to let her friend and pastor know what a saintly head it is notwithstanding.

I have laid aside three of the most secular letters, which I selected after wading through unnumbered pages of bewailings in the strain of a Wesleyan Madame Guyon. These throw some little light upon the character of Matthew Haygarth, but do not afford much information of a tangible kind.

I have transcribed the letters verbatim, adhering even to certain eccentricities of orthography which were by no means unusual in an age when

the Pretender to the crown of Great Britain wrote of his father as *Gems*.

The first letter bears the date of August 30th, 1773, one week after the marriage of the lady to our friend Matthew.

"Revered Friend and Pastor,—On Monday sennite we arriv'd in London, wich seems to me a mighty bigg citty, but of no more meritt or piety than Babylon of old. My husband, who knows y^e^ towne better than he knows those things with wich it would more become him to be familiar, was pleas'd to laugh mightily at that pious aversion wherewith I regarded some of y^e^ most notable sights in this place. We went t'other night to a great garden called by some Spring Garden, by others Vauxhall,—as having been at one time y^e^ residence or estate of that Arch Fiend and Papistical traitor Vaux, or Faux; but although I felt obligated to my husband for y^e^ desire to entertain me with a fine sight, I could not but look with shame upon serious Christians disporting themselves like children amongst co-

loured lamps, and listening as if enraptured to profane music, when, at so much less cost of money or of health, they might have been assembled together to improve and edify one another.

"My obliging Mathew would have taken me to other places of the like character; but inspir'd, as I hope and believe, by y^e^ direction of y^e^ spirit, I took upon myself to tell him what vain trifling is all such kind of pleasure. He argu'd with me stoutly, saying that y^e^ King and Queen, who are both shining examples of goodness and piety, do attend Vauxhall and Ranelagh, and are to be seen there frequent, to the delight of their subjects. On which I told him that, much as I esteemed my sovereign and his respectable consort, I would compleat my existence without having seen them rather than I would seek to encounter them in a place of vain and frivolous diversion. He listen'd to my discoorse in a kind and sober temper, but he was not convinc'd; for by and by he falls of a sudden to sighing and groaning, and cries out, 'O, I went to Vauxhall once when y^e^ garden was

not many years made, and O, how bright y^e^ lamps shone, like y^e^ stars of heaven fallen among bushes! and O, how sweet y^e^ music sounded, like y^e^ hymns of angels in the dewy evening! but that was nigh upon twenty years gone by, and all y^e^ world is changed since then.'

"You will conceive, Reverend Sir, that I was scandalised by such a foolish rapsodie, and in plain words admonish'd my husband of his folly. Whereupon he speedily became sober, and asked my pardon; but for all that night continued of a gloomy countenance, ever and anon falling to sighing and groning as before. Indeed, honour'd Sir, I have good need of a patient sperrit in my dealings with him; for altho' at times I think he is in a fair way to become a Christian, there are other times when I doubt Satan has still a hold upon him, and that all my prayers and admonitions have been in vaine.

"You, who know the wildness and wickedness of his past life—so far as that life was ever known to any but himself, who was ever of a secret and silent disposition concerning his own doings in

this city, tho' free-spoken and frank in all common matters—you, honour'd sir, know with how serious an intention I have taken upon myself the burden of matrimony, hoping thereby to secure the compleat conversion of this waywarde soul. You are aware how it was y^e^ earnest desire of my late respected father that Mathew Haygarth and I shou'd be man and wife, his father and my father haveing bin friends and companions in y^e^ days of her most gracious majesty Queen Anne. You know how, after being lost to all decent company for many years, Mathew came back after his father's death, and lived a sober and serious life, attending amongst our community, and being seen to shed tears on more than one occasion while listening to the discourse of our revered and inspired founder. And you, my dear and honour'd pastor, will feel for me when I tell you how I am tormented by y^e^ fear of backsliding in this soul which I have promised to restore to y^e^ fold. It was but yesterday, when walking with him near St. John's Gate at Clerkenwell, he came to a standstill all of a sudden, and he cried in that

impetuous manner which is even yet natural to him, 'Look ye now, Becky, wouldst like to see the house in which the happiest years of my life was spent?' And I making no answer, as thinking it was but some sudden freak, he points out a black dirty-looking dwelling-place, with overhanging windows and a wide gabled roof. 'Yonder it stands, Becky,' he cries; 'number seven John-street, Clerkenwell; a queer dingy box of four walls, my wench—a tumble-down kennel, with a staircase that 'twould break your neck to mount, being strange to it—and half-a-day's journey from the court-end of town. But that house was once paradise to me; and to look at it even now, though 'tis over eighteen years since I saw the inside of it, will bring the tears into these poor old eyes of mine.' And then he walk'd on so fast that I could scarce keep pace with him, till we came to Smithfield; and then he began to tell me about Bartholomew-fair and the brave sights he had seen; and must needs show me where had stood the booth of one Fielding—since infamously notorious as the writer of some trashy novels, the

dulness whereof is only surpassed by their profligacy; and then he talks of Fawkes the conjurer, who made a great fortune, and of some humble person called 'Tiddy Doll,' a dealer in gingerbread and such foolish wares. But he could tell me nothing of those early preachings of our revered founder in Moorfields, which would have been more pleasant to me than all this vain babble about drolls and jesters, gingerbread bakers and showmen.

"When we had walked the round of the place, and it was time to take coach for our lodging at Chelsea—he having brought me thus far to see St. Paul's and the prison of Newgate, the Mint and Tower—the gloomy fit came on him again, and all that evening he was dull and sorrowful, though I read aloud to him from the printed sermons of a rising member of our community. So you will see, honour'd sir, how difficult it is for these children of Satan to withdraw themselves from that master they have once served; since at the sober age of fifty-three yeares my husband's weak heart yet yearns after profligate

faires and foolish gardens lighted by color'd lampes.

"And now no more, reverend friend, my paper being gone and it being full time to reflect that y^r patience must be gone also. Service to Mrs. Goodge. I have no more room but to assure you that y^e gayeties of this foolish and erring citty have no power to withdraw y^e heart of her whose chief privilege it is to subscribe herself

"Your humble follower and servant,

"REBECCA HAYGARTH."

To my mind there seems just a shadowy hint of some by-gone romance in this letter. Why did the dingy house in John-street bring the tears into Matthew's eyes? and why did the memory of Vauxhall and Bartholomew Fair seem so sweet to him? And then that sighing and groaning and dolefulness of visage whenever the thought of the past came back to him?

What did it all mean, I wonder? Was it only his vanished youth, which poor, sobered, converted, Wesleyanised Matthew regretted? or were there

pensive memories of something even sweeter than youth associated with the coloured lamps of Vauxhall and the dinginess of Clerkenwell? Who shall sound the heart of a man who lived a hundred years ago? and where is the fathom-line which shall plumb its mysteries? I should need a stack of old letters before I could arrive at the secret of that man's life.

The two other letters, which I have selected after some deliberation, relate to the last few weeks of Matthew's existence; and in these again I fancy I see the trace of some domestic mystery, some sorrowful secret which this sober citizen kept hidden from his wife, but which he was on several occasions half inclined to reveal to her.

Perhaps if the lady's piety—which seems to have been thoroughly sincere and praiseworthy, by the bye—had been a little less cold and pragmatical in its mode of expression, poor Matthew might have taken heart of grace and made a clean breast of it.

That there was a secret in the man's life I feel convinced; but that conviction goes very little

way towards proving any one point of the smallest value to George Sheldon.

I transcribe an extract from each of the two important letters; the first written a month before Matthew's death, the second a fortnight after that event.

"And indeed, honour'd sir, I have of late suffered much uneasinesse of speritt concerning my husband. Those fits of y^e^ mopes of w^h^ I informed you some time back have again come upon him. For awhile I did hope that these melancholic affections were y^e^ fruit put forth by a regenerate soul; but within this month last past it has been my sorrow to discover that these gloomy disorders arise rather from y^e^ promptings of the Evil One. It has pleased Mr. Haygarthe of late to declare that his life is nigh at an end; and indeed he affects a conviction that his days are number'd. This profane and impertinent notion I take to be a direct inspiration of Satan, of a like character to y^e^ sudden and unaccountable fitts of laughter which have seized upon many pious Christians in the midst of earnest congregations;

whereby much shame and discomfiture has been brought upon our sect. Nor is there any justification for this presumptuous certainty entertained by my husband, inasmuch as his health is much as it has ordinarily been for y^e^ last ten years. He does acknowledge this with his own lips, and immediately after cries out that his race is run, and y^e^ hand of death is upon him; which I cannot but take as y^e^ voice of y^e^ enemy speaking through that weak mouth of y^e^ flesh.

"On Sunday night last past, y^e^ gloomy fitt being come upon him after prayers, Mr. Haygarthe began all on a sudden, as it is his habit to do:

"'There is something I would fain tell thee, wench,' he cries out, 'something about those roistering days in London which it might be well for thee to know.'

"But I answered him directly that I had no desire to hear of profane roisterings, and that it would be better for him to keep his peace, and listen reverently to the expounding of the Scriptures, which Humphrey Bagot, our worthy pastor

and friend, had promised to explain and exemplify after supper. We was seated at y^e^ time in y^e^ blue parlour, the table being spread for supper, and were awaiting our friend from the village, a man of humble station, being but a poor chapman and huckster, but of exalted mind and a most holy temper, and sells me the same growth of Bohea as that drunk by our gracious queen at Windsor.

"After I had thus reproved him—in no unkind spiritt—Mr. Haygarthe fell to sighing; and then cries out all at once:

"'When I am on my death-bed, wife, I will tell thee something; be sure thou askest me for it; or if death come upon me unawares, thou wouldst do well to search in the old tulip-leaf bureau for a letter, since I may tell thee that in a letter which I would not tell with these lips.'

"Before there was time to answer him in comes Mr. Bagot, and we to supper; after which he did read the sixth chapter of Hebrews and expound it at much length for our edifying; at the end whereof Satan had obtained fast hold of Mr.

Haygarthe, who was fallen asleep and snoring heavily."

Here is plain allusion to some secret, which that pragmatical idiot, Mrs. Rebecca, studiously endeavoured not to hear. The next extract is from a letter written when the lips that had been fain to speak were stilled for ever. Ah, Mistress Rebecca, you were but mortal woman, although you were also a shining light amongst the followers of John Wesley; and I wonder what you would have given for poor Matthew's secret *then*.

"Some days being gone after this melancholic event, I bethought me of that which my husband had said to me before I left Dewsdale for that excursion to the love-feasts at Kemberton and Kesfield, Broppindean and Dawnfold, from which I returned but two short weeks before my poor Matthew's demise. I called to remembrance that discourse about approaching death which in my poor human judgement I did esteem a pestilent error of mind, but which I do now recognise as a

spiritual premonition; and I set myself earnestly to look for that letter which Matthew told me he would leave in the tulip-leaf bureau. But though I did search with great care and pains, my trouble was wasted, inasmuch as there was no letter. Nor did I leave off to search until ev'ry nook and crevvis had been examin'd. But in one of y^e^ secret drawers, hidden in an old dog's-eared book of prayers, I did find a lock of fair hair, as if cut from the head of a child, entwin'd curiously with a long plait of dark hair, which by reason of y^e^ length thereof, must needs have been the hair of a woman, and with these the miniature of a girl's face, in a gold frame. I will not stain this paper, which is near come to an end, by the relation of such suspicions as arose in my mind on finding these curious treasures; nor will I be of so unchristian a temper as to speak ill of the dead. My husband was in his latter days exemplarily sober, and a humble acting Xtian. Y^e^ secrets of his earlier life will not now be showne to me on this side heaven. I have set aside y^e^ book, y^e^ picture, and y^e^ plaited hair in my desk for conveniency, where

I will show them to you when I am next rejoic'd by y^r^ improving conversation. Until then, in grief or in happiness, in health and sickness, I trust I shall ever continue, with y^e^ same sincerity,

"Your humble and obliged

"Servant and disciple

"Rebecca Haygarthe."

Thus end my excerpts from the correspondence of Mrs. Haygarth. They are very interesting to me, as containing the vague shadow of a vanished existence; but whether they will ever be worth setting forth in an affidavit is extremely uncertain. Doubtless that miniature of an unknown girl which caused so much consternation in the mind of sober Mrs. Rebecca was no other than the "Molly" whose gray eyes reminded me of Charlotte Halliday.

As I copied Mrs. Rebecca's quaint epistles, in the midnight stillness, the things of which I was writing arose before me like a picture. I could see the blue parlour that Sunday evening; the sober couple seated primly opposite to each other;

the china monsters on the high chimneypiece; the blue-and-white Dutch tiles, with queer squat figures of Flemish citizens on foot and on horseback; the candles burning dimly on the spindle-legged table; two poor pale flames reflected ghastly in the dark polished panels of the wainscot; the big open Bible on an adjacent table; the old silver tankard, and buckhorn-handled knives and forks set out for supper; the solemn eight-day clock, ticking drearily in the corner; and amid all that sombre old-fashioned comfort, gray-haired Matthew sighing and lamenting for his vanished youth.

I have grown strangely romantic since I have fallen in love with Charlotte Halliday. The time was when I should have felt nothing but a flippant ignorant contempt for poor Haygarth's feeble sighings and lamentings; but now I think of him with a sorrowful tenderness, and am more interested in his poor commonplace life, that picture, and those two locks of hair, than in the most powerful romance that ever emanated from mortal genius. It has been truly said, that truth is stranger than fiction; may it not as justly be said, that truth has

a power to touch the human heart which is lacking in the most sublime flights of a Shakespeare, or the grandest imaginings of an Æschylus? One is sorry for the fate of Agamemnon; but one is infinitely more sorrowful for the cruel death of that English Richard in the dungeon at Pomfret, who was a very insignificant person as compared to the king of men and of ships.

CHAPTER III.

HUNTING THE JUDSONS.

Oct. 10*th.* Yesterday and the day before were blank days. On Saturday I read Mrs. Rebecca's letters a second time after a late breakfast, and spent a lazy morning in the endeavour to pick up any stray crumbs of information which I might have overlooked the previous night. There was nothing to be found, however; and, estimable as I have always considered the founder of the Wesleyan fraternity, I felt just a little weary of his virtues and his discourses, his journeyings from place to place, his love-feasts, and his prayer-meetings, before I had finished with Mrs. Haygarth's correspondence. In the afternoon, I strolled about the town; made inquiries at several inns, with a view to discover whether Captain Paget was peradventure an inmate thereof; looked in at

the railway-station, and watched the departure of a train; dawdled away half an hour at the best tobacconist's shop in the town on the chance of encountering my accomplished patron, who indulges in two of the choicest obtainable cigars per diem, and might possibly repair thither to make a purchase, if he were in the place. Whether he is still in Ullerton or not, I cannot tell; but he did not come to the tobacconist's; and I was fain to go back to my inn, having wasted a day. Yet I do not think that George Sheldon will have cause to complain of me, since I have worked very closely for my twenty shillings per week, and have devoted myself to the business in hand with an amount of enthusiasm which I did not think it possible for me to experience—except for——

I went to church on Sunday morning, and was more devoutly inclined than it has been my habit to feel; for although a man who lives by his wits must not necessarily be a heathen or an atheist, it is very difficult for him to be anything like a Christian; even my devotion yesterday was not worth much, for my thoughts went vagabondising

off to Charlotte Halliday in the midst of a very sensible practical sermon.

In the afternoon I read the papers, and dozed by the fire in the coffee-room—two-thirds coke by the way, and alternating from the fierceness of a furnace to a dreary blackness—still thinking of Charlotte.

Late in the evening I walked the streets of the town, and thought what a lonely wretch I was. The desert of Sahara is somewhat dismal, I daresay; but in its dismality there is at least a flavour of romance, a smack of adventure. O, the hopeless dulness, the unutterable blankness of a provincial town late on a Sunday night, as it presents itself to the contemplation of a friendless young man without a sixpence in his pocket, or one bright hope to tempt him to forgetfulness of the past in pleasant dreaming of the future!

Complaining again! O pen, which art the voice of my discontent, your spluttering is like this outburst of unmanly fretfulness and futile rage! O paper, whose flat surface typifies the dull level of my life, your greasy unwillingness to re-

ceive the ink is emblematic of the soul's revolt against destiny!

This afternoon brought me a letter from Sheldon, and opened a new channel for my explorations in that underground territory, the past. That man has a marvellous aptitude for his work; and has, what is more than aptitude, the experience of ten years of failure. Such a man must succeed sooner or later. I wonder whether his success will come while I am allied to him. I have been used to consider myself an unlucky wretch, a creature of ill-fortune to others as well as to myself. It is a foolish superstition, perhaps, to fancy oneself set apart for an evil destiny; but the Eumenides have been rather hard upon me. Those "amiable" deities, whom they of Colonæ tried so patiently to conciliate with transparent flatteries, have marked me for their prey from the cradle—I don't suppose that cradle was paid for, by the bye. I wonder whether there is an avenging deity whose special province it is to pursue the insolvent, a Nemesis of the Bankruptcy Court.

My Sheldon's epistle bears the evidence of a very subtle brain, as I think. It is longer than his previous letters. I transcribe it here, as I wish this record to be a complete brief of my proceedings in this Haygarth business.

"Gray's Inn, Sunday night.

"DEAR HAWKEHURST,—The copies of the letters came duly to hand, and I think you have made your selections with much discretion, always supposing you have overlooked nothing in the remaining mass of writing. I will thank you to send me the rest of the letters, by the way. You can take notes of anything likely to be useful to yourself, and it will be as well for me to possess the originals.

"I find one very strong point in the first letter of your selection, viz. the allusion to a house in John-street. It is clear that Matthew lived in that house, and in that neighbourhood there may even yet remain some traces of his existence. I shall begin a close investigation to-morrow within a certain radius of that spot; and if I have the good luck to fall upon any clear-headed centenarians, I may pick up something.

"There are some almshouses hard by Whitecross-street Prison, where the inmates live to ages that savour of the Pentateuch. Perhaps there I may light upon some impoverished citizen fallen from a good estate who can remember some contemporary of Matthew's. London was smaller in those days than it is now, and men lived out their lives in one spot, and had leisure to be concerned about the affairs of their neighbours. As I have now something of a clue to Matthew's roistering days, I shall set to work to follow it up closely; and your provincial researches and my metropolitan investigations proceeding simultaneously, we may hope to advance matters considerably ere long. For your own part, I should advise you forthwith to hunt up the Judson branch. You will remember that Matthew's only sister was a Mrs. Judson of Ullerton. I want to find an heir-at-law in a direct line from Matthew; and you know my theory on that point. But if we fail in that direction, we must of course fall back upon the Judsons, who are a disgustingly complicated set of people, and will take half a lifetime to dis-

entangle, to say nothing of other men who may be working the same business, and who are pretty sure to have pinned their faith on the female branch of the Haygarthian tree.

"I want you to ferret out some of the Judson descendants with a view to picking up further documentary evidence in the shape of old letters, inscriptions in old books, and so on. That Matthew had a secret is certain; and that he was very much inclined to reveal that secret in his later days is also certain. Who shall say that he did not tell it to his only sister, though he was afraid to tell it to his wife?

"You have acted with so much discretion up to this point that I do not care to trouble you with any further hints or suggestions. When money is wanted, it shall be forthcoming; but I must beg you to manage things economically, as I have to borrow at a considerable sacrifice; and should this affair prove a failure my ruin is inevitable.

"Yours, &c. G. S."

My friend Sheldon is a man who can never

have been more than "yours et-cetera" to any human creature. I suppose what he calls ruin would be a quiet passage through the Bankruptcy Court, and a new set of chambers. I should not suppose that sort of ruin would be very terrible for a man whose sole possessions are a few weak-backed horse-hair chairs, a couple of battered old desks, half a dozen empty japanned boxes, a file of *Bell's Life* and a Turkey carpet in which the progress of corruption is evident to the casual observer.

The hunting-up of the Judsons is a very easy matter as compared to the task of groping in the dimness of the past in search of some faint traces of the footsteps of departed Haygarths. Whereas the Haygarth family seem to be an extinct race, the Judsonian branch have bred and mustered in the land; and my chief difficulty in starting has been an *embarras de richesse*, in the shape of half a page of Judsons in the Ullerton directory.

Whether to seek out Theodore Judson, the attorney in Nile-street East, or the Rev. James Judson, curate of St. Gamaliel; whether to appeal

in the first instance to Judson & Co., haberdashers and silk mercers, of the Ferrygate, or to Judson of Judson and Grinder, wadding manufacturers in Lady-lane—was the grand question. On inquiring of the landlord as to the antecedents of these Judsons, I found that they were all supposed to spring from one common stock, and to have the blood of old Jonathan Haygarth in their veins. The Judsons had been an obscure family—people of "no account," my landlord told me, until Joseph Judson, chapman and cloth merchant in a very small way, was so fortunate as to win the heart of Ruth Haygarth, only daughter of the wealthy nonconformist grocer in the market-place. This marriage had been the starting-point of Joseph Judson's prosperity. Old Haygarth had helped his industrious and respectable son-in-law along the stony road that leads to fortune, and had no doubt given him many a lift over the stones which bestrew that toilsome highway. My landlord's information was as vague as the information of people in general; but it was easily to be made out, from his scanty shreds and scraps of infor-

mation, that the well-placed Judsons of the present day had almost all profited to some extent by the hard-earned wealth of Jonathan Haygarth. "They've nearly all of them got the name of Haygarth mixed up with their other names somehow," said my landlord. "Judson of Judson and Grinder is Thomas Haygarth Judson. He's a member of our tradesman's club, and worth a hundred thousand pounds, if he's worth a sixpence."

I have observed, by the way, that a wealthy tradesman in a country town is never accredited with less than a hundred thousand; there seems a natural hankering in the human mind for round numbers.

"There's J. H. Judson of St. Gamaliel," continued my landlord, "he's James Haygarth Judson; and young Judson the attorney's son puts 'Haygarth Judson' on his card, and gets people to call him Haygarth Judson when they will—which in a general way they won't, on account of his giving himself airs, which you may see him any summer evening walking down Ferrygate as

if the place belonged to him, and he didn't set much value on it. They *do* say his father 's heir-at-law to a million of money left by the last of the Haygarths, and that he and the son are trying to work up a claim to the property against the Crown. But I've heard young Judson deny it in our room when he was spoken to about it, and I don't suppose there's much ground for people's talk."

I was sorry to discover there was any ground for such talk; Mr. Judson the lawyer would be no insignificant opponent. I felt that I must give a very wide berth to Mr. Theodore Judson the attorney, and his stuck-up son, unless circumstances should so shape themselves as to oblige us to work with him. In the mean while any move I made amongst the other Judsons would be likely, I thought, to come to the knowledge of these particular members of the family.

"Are the Judson family very friendly with one another?" I artfully inquired.

"Well, you see some of 'em are, and some of 'em ain't. They're most of 'em third and fourth cousins, you see, and that ain't a very near rela-

tionship in a town where there's a good deal of competition, and interests often clash. Young Theodore — Haygarth Judson as he calls himself —is very thick with Judson of St. Gamaliel's— they were at college together, you see—and fine airs they give themselves on the strength of a couple of years or so at Cambridge. Those two get on very well together. But Judson of the Lady-lane Mills don't speak to either of 'em when he meets 'em in the street, and has been known to cut 'em dead in my room. William Judson of Ferrygate is a dissenter, and keeps himself to himself very close. The other Judsons are too fast a lot for him: though what's the harm of a man taking a glass or two of brandy-and-water of an evening with his friends is more than *I* can find out," added mine host musingly.

It was to William Judson the dissenter, who kept himself to himself, that I determined to present myself in the first instance. As a dissenter, he would be likely to have more respect for the memory of the Nonconformist and Wesleyan Haygarths, and to have preserved any traditions re-

lating to them with more fidelity than the Anglican and frivolous members of the Judson family. As an individual who kept himself to himself, he would be unlikely to communicate my business to his kindred.

I lost no time in presenting myself at the house of business in Ferrygate, and after giving the servant George Sheldon's card, and announcing myself as concerned in a matter of business relating to the Haygarth family, I was at once ushered into a prim counting-house, where a dapper little old gentleman in spotless broadcloth, and a cambric cravat and shirtfrill which were soft and snowy as the plumage of the swan, received me with old-fashioned courtesy. I was delighted to find him seventy-five years of age at the most moderate computation, and I should have been all the better pleased if he had been older.

I very quickly discovered that in Mr. Judson the linendraper I had to deal with a very different person from the Rev. Jonah Goodge. He questioned me closely as to my motive in seeking information on the subject of the departed Haygarth,

and I had some compunction in diplomatising with him as I had diplomatised with Mr. Goodge. To hoodwink the wary Jonah was a triumph, to deceive the confiding linendraper was a shame. However, as I have before set down, I suppose at the falsest I am not much further from the truth than a barrister or a diplomatist. Mr. Judson accepted my account of myself in all simplicity, and seemed quite pleased to have an opportunity of talking about the Haygarths.

"You are not concerned in the endeavour to assert Theodore Judson's claim to the late John Haygarth's property, eh?" the old man asked me presently, as if struck by a sudden misgiving.

I assured him that Mr. Theodore Judson's interests and mine were in no respect identical.

"I am glad of that," answered the draper; "not that I owe Theodore Judson a grudge, you must understand, though his principles and mine differ very widely. I have been told that he and his son hope to establish a claim to that Haygarth property; but they will never succeed, sir—they

will never succeed. There was a young man who went to India in '41; a scamp and a vagabond, sir, who was always trying to borrow money, in sums ranging from a hundred pounds, to set him up in business and render him a credit to his family, to a shilling for the payment of a night's lodging or the purchase of a dinner. But that young man was the great-grandson of Ruth Haygarth—the eldest surviving grandson of Ruth Haygarth's eldest son; and if that man is alive, he is rightful heir to John Haygarth's money. Whether he is alive or dead at this present moment is more than I can tell, since he has never been heard of in Ullerton since he left the town; but until Theodore Judson can obtain legal proof of that man's death he has no more chance of getting one sixpence of the Haygarth estate than I have of inheriting the crown of Great Britain."

The old man had worked himself into a little passion before he finished this speech, and I could see that the Theodore Judsons were as unpopular in the draper's counting-house as they were at the Swan Inn.

"What was this man's Christian name?" I asked.

"Peter. He was called Peter Judson; and was the great-grandson of my grandfather, Joseph Judson, who inhabited this very house, sir, more than a hundred years ago. Let me see; Peter Judson must have been about five-and-twenty years of age when he left Ullerton; so he is a middle-aged man by this time if he hasn't killed himself, or if the climate hasn't killed him long ago. He went as supercargo to a merchant vessel; he was a clever fellow, and could work hard when it suited him, in spite of his dissipated life. Theodore Judson is a very good lawyer; but though he may bring all his ingenuity to bear, he will never advance a step nearer to the possession of John Haygarth's money till he obtains evidence of Peter Judson's death; and he's afraid to advertise for that evidence for fear he might arouse the attention of other claimants."

Much as I was annoyed to find that there were claimants lying in wait for the rev. intestate's wealth, I was glad to perceive that

Theodore Judson's unpopularity was calculated to render his kindred agreeably disposed to any stranger likely to push that gentleman out of the list of competitors for these great stakes, and I took my cue from this in my interview with the simple old draper.

"I regret that I am not at liberty to state the nature of my business," I said, in a tone that was at once insinuating and confidential; "but I think I may venture to go so far as to say, without breach of trust to my employer, that whoever may ultimately succeed to the Rev. John Haygarth's money, neither Mr. Judson the lawyer nor his son will ever put a finger on a penny of it."

"I am not sorry to hear it," answered Mr. Judson, enraptured; "not that I owe the young man a grudge, you must understand, but because he is particularly undeserving of good fortune. A young man who passes his own kindred in the streets of his native town without the common courtesy due to age or respectability; a young man who sneers at the fortune acquired in an

honest and reputable trade; a young man who calls his cousins counter-jumpers, and his aunts and uncles 'swaddlers'—a vulgar term of contempt applied to the earlier members of the Wesleyan confraternity;—such a young man is not the individual to impart moral lustre to material wealth, and I am free to confess that I had rather any one else than Theodore Judson should inherit this vast fortune. Why, are you aware, my dear sir, that he has been seen to drive tandem through this very street, as it is; and I should like to know how many horses he would harness to that gig of his, or how openly he would insult his relatives, if he had a hundred thousand pounds to deal with."

"A hundred thousand pounds!" exclaimed I; "am I to understand that the fortune left by the Reverend John Haygarth amounts to that sum?"

"To every penny of it, sir; and a nice use Theodore Judson and that precious son of his would make of it if it fell into their hands."

For a second time Mr. Judson the draper had worked himself into a little passion, and the

conversation had to be discontinued for some minutes while he cooled down to his ordinary temperament.

"O ho," said I within myself while awaiting the completion of this cooling-down process; "so *this* is the stake for which my friend Sheldon is playing!"

"I'll tell you what I will do for you, Mr.—Mr. Hawkeshell"—Mr. Judson said at last, making a compound of my own and my employer's names, "I will give you a line of introduction to my sister. If any one can help you in hunting up intelligence relating to the past she can. She is two years my junior—seventy-one years of age—but as bright and active as a girl. She has lived all her life in Ullerton, and is a woman who hoards every scrap of paper that comes in her way. If old letters or old newspapers can assist you, she can show you plenty amongst her stores."

Upon this the old man wrote a note, which he dried with sand out of a perforated bottle, as Richard Steele may have dried one of those airy

tender essays which he threw off in tavern parlours for the payment of a jovial dinner.

Provided with this antique epistle, written on Bath post and sealed with a great square seal from a bunch of cornelian monstrosities which the draper carried at his watch-chain, I departed to find Miss Hephzibah Judson, of Lochiel Villa, Lancaster-road.

CHAPTER IV.

GLIMPSES OF A BYGONE LIFE.

October 10*th*. I found the villa inhabited by Miss Hephzibah Judson very easily, and found it one of those stiff square dwelling-houses with brass curtain-rods, prim flower-beds, and vivid green palings, only to be discovered in full perfection in the choicer suburb of a country town.

I had heard enough during my brief residence in Ullerton to understand that to live in the Lancaster-road was to possess a diploma of respectability not easily vitiated by individual conduct. No disreputable person had ever yet set up their unholy Lares and Penates in one of those new slack-baked villas; and that person must have been very bold who, conscious of moral unfitness or pecuniary shortcoming, should have ventured to pitch his tent in that sacred locality.

Miss Hephzibah Judson was one of the individuals whose shining sanctity of life and comfortable income lent a reflected brightness to the irreproachable suburb. I was admitted to her abode by an elderly woman of starched demeanour but agreeable visage, who ushered me into a spotless parlour whereof the atmosphere was of that vault-like coldness peculiar to a room which is only inhabited on state occasions. Here the starched domestic left me while she carried my letter of introduction to her mistress. In her absence I had leisure to form some idea of Miss Judson's character on the mute evidence of Miss Judson's surroundings. From the fact that there were books of a sentimental and poetical tenor amongst the religious works ranged at mathematically correct distances upon the dark-green table-cover—from the presence of three twittering canaries in a large brass cage—from the evidence of a stuffed Blenheim spaniel with intensely brown eyes reclining on a crimson velvet cushion under a glass-shade, I opined that Miss Judson's piety was pleasantly leavened by sentiment, and that her

Wesleyanism was agreeably tempered by that womanly tenderness which, failing more legitimate outlets, will waste itself upon twittering canaries and plethoric spaniels.

I was not mistaken. Miss Judson appeared presently, followed by the servant bearing a tray of cake and wine. This was the first occasion on which I had been offered refreshment by any person to whom I had presented myself. I argued, therefore, that Miss Judson was the weakest person with whom I had yet had to deal; and I flattered myself with the hope that from Miss Judson's amiable weakness, sentimentality, and womanly tenderness, I should obtain better aid than from more business-like and practical people.

I fancied that with this lady it would be necessary to adopt a certain air of candour. I therefore did not conceal from her the fact that my business had something to do with that Haygarthian fortune awaiting a claimant.

"The person for whom you are concerned is not Mr. Theodore Judson?" she asked, with some asperity.

I assured her that I had never seen Theodore Judson, and that I was in no manner interested in his success.

"In that case I shall be happy to assist you as far as lies in my power; but I can do nothing to advance the interests of Theodore Judson junior. I venture to hope that I am a Christian; and if Theodore Judson junior were to come here to me and ask my forgiveness, I should accord that forgiveness as a Christian; but I cannot and will not lend myself to the furtherance of Theodore Judson's avaricious designs. I cannot lend myself to the suppression of truth or the assertion of falsehood. Theodore Judson senior is not the rightful heir to the late John Haygarth's fortune, though I am bound to acknowledge that his claim would be prior to my brother's. There is a man who stands before the Theodore Judsons, and the Theodore Judsons know it. But were they the rightful claimants, I should still consider them most unfitted to enjoy superior fortune. If that dog could speak, he would be able to testify to ill-usage received from Theodore Judson junior at his own

garden-gate which would bespeak the character of the man to every thoughtful mind. A young man who could indulge his spiteful feelings against an elderly kinswoman at the expense of an unoffending animal is not the man to make a worthy use of fortune."

I expressed my acquiescence with this view of the subject; and I was glad to perceive that with Miss Judson, as with her brother, the obnoxious Theodores would stand me in good stead. The lady was only two years younger than her brother, and even more inclined to be communicative. I made the most of my opportunity, and sat in the vault-like parlour listening respectfully to her discourse, and from time to time hazarding a leading question, as long as it pleased her to converse; although it seemed to me as if a perennial spring of cold water were trickling slowly down my back and pervading my system during the entire period.

As the reward of my fortitude I obtained Miss Judson's promise to send me any letters or papers she might find amongst her store of old documents

relating to the personal history of Matthew Haygarth.

"I know I have a whole packet of letters in Matthew's own hand amongst my grandmother's papers," said Miss Judson. "I was a great favourite with my grandmother, and used to spend a good deal of my time with her before she died—which she did while I was in pinafores; but young people wore pinafores much longer in my time than they do now; and I was getting on for fourteen years of age when my grandmother departed this life. I've often heard her talk of her brother Matthew, who had been dead some years when I was born. She was very fond of him, and he of her, I've heard her say; and she used often to tell me how handsome he was in his youth, and how well he used to look in a chocolate and gold-laced riding-coat just after the victory of Culloden, when he came to Ullerton in secret, to pay her a visit—not being on friendly terms with his father."

I asked Miss Judson if she had ever read Matthew Haygarth's letters.

"No," she said; "I look at them sometimes

when I'm tidying the drawer in which I keep them, and I have sometimes stopped to read a word here and there, but no more. I keep them out of respect to the dead; but I think it would make me unhappy to read them. The thoughts and the feelings in old letters seem so fresh that it brings our poor mortality too closely home to us when we remember how little except those faded letters remains of those who wrote them. It is well for us to remember that we are only travellers and wayfarers on this earth; but sometimes it seems just a little hard to think how few traces of our footsteps we leave behind us when the journey is finished."

The canaries seemed to answer Miss Judson with a feeble twitter of assent: and I took my leave, with a feeling of compassion in my heart. I the scamp—I Robert Macaire the younger—had pity upon the caged canaries, and the lonely old woman whose narrow life was drawing to its close, and who began to feel how very poor a thing it had been after all.

Oct. 11*th.* I have paid the penalty of my teme-

rity in enduring the vault-like chilliness of Miss Hephzibah Judson's parlour, and am suffering to-day from a sharp attack of influenza; that complaint which of all others tends to render a man a burden to himself, and a nuisance to his fellow-creatures. Under these circumstances I have ordered a fire in my own room—a personal indulgence scarcely warranted by Sheldon's stipend—and I sit by my own fire pondering over the story of Matthew Haygarth's life.

On the table by my side are scattered more than a hundred letters, all in Matthew's bold hand; but even yet, after a most careful study of those letters, the story of the man's existence is far from clear to me. The letters are full of hints and indications, but they tell so little plainly. They deal in enigmas, and disguise names under the mask of initials.

There is much in these letters which relates to the secret history of Matthew's life. They were written to the only creature amongst his kindred in whom he fully confided. This fact transpires more than once, as will be seen anon by the ex-

tracts I shall proceed to make; if my influenza—which causes me to shed involuntary tears that give me the appearance of a drivelling idiot, and which jerks me nearly out of my chair every now and then with a convulsive sneeze—will permit me to do anything rational or useful.

I have sorted and classified the letters, first upon one plan, then upon another, until I have classified and sorted them into chaos. Having done this, my only chance is to abandon all idea of classification, and go quietly through them in consecutive order according to their dates, jotting down whatever strikes me as significant. George Sheldon's acumen must do the rest.

Thus I begin my notes, with an extract from the fourth letter in the series. Mem. I preserve Matthew's own orthography, which is the most eccentric it was ever my lot to contemplate.

"*December* 14, '42. Indeed, my dear Ruth, I am ventursom wear you are concurn'd, and w^{d} tell you that I w^{d} taik panes to kepe fromm another. I saw y^{e} same girl w^{h} it was my good fortun to saive from y^{e} molestashun of raketters

and mohoks at Smithfelde in September last past. She is y^e^ derest prittiest creture you ever saw, and as elegant and genteel in her speche and maner as a Corte lady, or as y^e^ best bredd person in Ullerton. I mett her in y^e^ nayborood of y^e^ Marchalsee prison wear her father is at this pressent time a prisener, and had som pleassant talke with her. She rememberr'd me at once, and seme'd mitily gladd to see me. Mem. Her pritty blu eys wear fill'd with teares wen she thank'd me for having studd up to be her champyun at y^e^ Fare. So you see, Mrs. Ruth, y^r^ brotherr is more thort off in London than with them which hav y^e^ rite to regard him bestt. If you had seen y^e^ pore simpel childeish creetur and heeard her tell her arteless tale, I think y^r^ kinde hart w^d^ have bin sore to considder so much unmiritted misfortun; y^e^ father is in pore helth, a captiv, y^e^ mother has binn dedd thre yeres, and y^e^ pore orfann girl, Mollie, has to mentane y^e^ burden of y^e^ sick father, and a yung helples sister. Think of this, kinde Mrs. Ruth, in y^r^ welthy home. Mem. Pore Mrs. Mollie is prittier than y^e^ fineist ladies that wear to be sene

at y^e^ opening of y^e^ grand new roome at Ranellar this spring last past, wear I sor y^e^ too Miss Gunings and Lady Harvey, wich is alsoe accounted a grate buty."

I think this extract goes very far to prove that my friend Matthew was considerably smitten by the pretty young woman whose champion he had been in some row at Bartholomew Fair. This fits into one of the scraps of information afforded by my ancient inhabitant in Ullerton Almshouses, who remembers having heard his grandfather talk of Mat Haygarth's part in some fight or disturbance at the great Smithfield festival.

My next extract treats again of Mollie, after an interval of four months. It seems as if Matthew had confided in his sister so far as to betray his tenderness for the poor player girl of the London booths; but I can find no such letter amongst those in my hands. Such an epistle may have been considered by Mrs. Ruth too dangerous to be kept where the parental eye might in some evil hour discover it. Matthew's sister was unmarried at

this date, and lived within the range of that stern paternal eye. Matthew's letter appears to me to have been written in reply to some solemn warning from Ruth.

"*April* 12, 1743. Sure, my dear sister cannot think me so baise a retch as to injoore a pore simpel girl hoo confides in me as y^e best and trooest of mortals, wich for her dere saik I will strive to be. If so be my sister cou'^d think so ill of me it wou'^d amost temt me to think amiss of her, wich cou'^d imagen so vile a thort. You tel me that Mrs. Rebecka Caulfeld is mor than ever estemed by my father; but, Ruth, I am bounde to say, my father's esteme is nott to be y^e rule of my ackshuns thro' life, for it semes to me their is no worser tyrrannie than y^t wich fathers do striv to impose on there children, and I do acount that a kind of barbarity wich wou'^d compel y^e hart of youth to sute y^e proodense of age. I do not dout but Mrs. Rebecka is a mitey proper and well-natur'd person, tho' taken upp with this new sekt of methodys, or as sum do call them in derission swaddlers and jumpers, set

afoot by y^e^ madbrain'd young man, Wesley, and one that is still madder, Witfelde. Thear ar I dare sware many men in Ullerton wich wou'^d^ be gladd to obtane Mrs. Rebecka's hand and fortun; but if y^e^ fortun wear ten times more, I wou'd not preetend to oferr my harte to herr w^h^ can never be its misteress. Now, my deare sister, having gone as farr towards satisficing all y^r^ queerys as my paper wou'd welle permitt, I will say no more but to begg you to send me all y^e^ knews, and to believe that none can be more affectionately y^r^ humble servant than your brother, MATHEW HAYGARTH."

In this extract we have strong ground for supposing that our Matthew truly loved the player-girl, and meant honestly by his sweetheart. There is a noble indignation in his repudiation of his sister's doubts, and a manly determination not to marry Mrs. Rebecca's comfortable fortune. I begin to think that Sheldon's theory of an early and secret marriage will turn up a trump card; but Heaven only knows how slow or how difficult may be the labour of proving such a marriage. And

then, even if we can find documentary evidence of such an event, we shall have but advanced one step in our obscure path, and should have yet to discover the issue of that union, and to trace the footsteps of Matthew's unknown descendants during the period of a century.

I wonder how Sisyphus felt when the stone kept rolling back upon him. Did he ever look up to the top of the mountain and calculate the distance he must needs traverse before his task should be done?

The next letter in which I find a passage worth transcribing is of much later date, and abounds in initials. The post-mark is illegible; but I can just make out the letters PO and L. The two first close together, the third after an interval; and there is internal evidence to show that the letter was written from some dull country place. Might not that place have been Spotswold? the PO and the L of the post-mark would fit very well into the name of that village. Again I leave this question to the astute Sheldon.

The date is March 1749.

"M. is but porely. Sumtimes I am pain'd to believe this quiett life is not well suted to herr disposishun, having bin acustumed to so much livlinesse and nois. I hav reproched her with this, but she tolde me with teres in her eys, to be neare mee and M. and C. was to be happie, and y^t it is il helth onlie wich is y^e cawse of y^e sadnesse. I pray heaven M.'s helth may be on y^e mending hand soone. Little M. grows more butifull everry day; and indede, my dear sisterr, if you cou'd stele another visitt this waye, and oblidge y^r affectionat brother, you wou'd considerr him y^e moste butifull creetur ever scene. So much enteligence with sich ingaging temper endeares him to all hartes. Mrs. J. says she adors him, and is amost afraide to be thort a Paygann for bestoeing so much affection on a erthly creetur, and this to oure good parson who cou'd find no reproche for her plesant folly.

"We hav had heavy ranes all y^e week last past. Sech wether can but serve to hinderr M.'s recovery. The fysichion at G., wear I tooke her, saies she shou'd hav much fresh aire everry day—if not

afoot, to be carrid in a chaire or cotche; but in this wether, and in a plaice wear neeither chaire nor cotche can be had, she must needs stop in doors. I hav begg'd her to lett me carry her to G., but she will not, and says in y^e^ summerr she will be as strong as everr. I pray God she may be so. Butt theire are times whenn my harte is sore and heavy; and the rane beeting agenst the winder semes lik dropps of cold worter falling uponn my pore aking harte. If you cou'd stele a visitt you wou'd see wether she semes worse than whenn you sor her last ortumm; she is tricing y^e^ tansy tea; and beggs her service to you, and greatfull thanks for y^r^ rememberence of her. I dare to say you here splended acounts of my doins in London—at cok fites and theaters, dansing at Vorxhall, and beeting y^e^ wotch in Covin Garden. Does my F. stil use to speke harsh agenst me, or has he ni forgott their is sech a creetur living? If he has so, I hope you wil kepe him in sech forgetfullnesse,—and obliage

"y^r^ loving brother and obediant servent,

"MATHEW HAYGARTH."

To me this letter is almost conclusive evidence of a marriage. Who can this little M. be, of whom he writes so tenderly, except a child? Who can this woman be, whose ill health causes him such anxiety, unless a wife? Of no one *but* a wife could he write so freely to his sister. The place to which he asks her to "steal a visit" must needs be a home to which a man could invite his sister. I fancy it is thus made very clear that at this period Matthew Haygarth was secretly married and living at Spotswold, where his wife and son were afterwards buried, and whence the body of the son was ultimately removed to Dewsdale to be laid in that grave which the father felt would soon be his own resting-place. That allusion to the Ullerton talk of London roisterings indicates that Matthew's father believed him to be squandering the paternal substance in the metropolis at the very time when the young man was leading a simple domestic life within fifty miles of the paternal abode. No man could do such a thing in these days of rapid locomotion, when every creature is more or less

peripatetic; but in that benighted century the distance from Ullerton to Spotswold constituted a day's journey. That Matthew was living in one place while he was supposed to be in another, is made sufficiently clear by several passages in his letters, all more or less in the strain of the following:

"I was yesterday—markett-day—at G., wear I ran suddennly agenst Peter Browne's eldest ladd. Ye boy openn'd his eyes wide, stearing like an owle; butt I gaive him bakk his looke with interrest, and tolde him if he was curiouse to know my name, I was Simon Lubchick, farmer, at his servise. Ye pore simpel ladd ask'd my pardonn humbly for having mistook me for a gentelman of Ullerton—a frend of his father; on wich I gaive him a shillin, and we parted, vastly plesed with eche other; and this is nott the fust time the site of Ullerton fokes has putt me into a swett."

Amongst later letters are very sad ones. The little M. is dead. The father's poor aching heart proclaims its anguish in very simple words:

"*Nov.* 1751. I thank my dear sister kindly for her friendlinesse and compashin; butt, ah, he is gone, and their semes to be no plesure or comforte on this erth without him! onlie a littel childe of 6 yeres, and yett so dere a creetur to this harte that the worlde is emty and lonely without him. M. droopes sadly, and is more ailing everry day. Indede, my dere Ruth, I see nothing butt sorrow before me, and I wou'd be right gladd to lay down at peece in my littel M.'s grave."

I can find no actual announcements of death: only sad allusions here and there. I fancy the majority of Matthew's letters must have been lost, for the dates of those confided to my hands are very far apart, and there is evidence in all of them of other correspondence. After the letter alluding to little M.'s death, there is a hiatus of eight years. Then comes a letter with the post-mark London very clear, from which I transcribe an extract.

"*October 4th*, 1759. The toun is very sadd; everry body, high and low, rich and pore, in morning for Gennerel Wolf: wot a nobel deth to

die, and how much happier than to live, when one considers the cairs and miseries of this life; and seeh has bin the oppinion of wiser fokes than y^r^ humble servent. Being in companie on Thersday sennite with that distingwish'd riter, Dr. Johnson, —whose admir'd story of *Raselass* I sent you new from y^e^ press, but who I am bound to confesse is less admirable as a fine gentlemann than as an orther, his limning siled and his kravatt twisted ary, and his manners wot in a more obskure personn wou'd be thort ungenteel,—he made a remark wich impress'd me much. Some one present, being almost all gentelmenn of parts and learning except y^r^ pore untuter'd brother, observed that it was a saying with the ainchents that y^e^ happiest of men was him wich was never born; y^e^ next happy him wich died the soonest. On wich Doctor Johnson cried out verry loud and angry, 'That was a Paggann sentyment, sir, and I am asham'd that a Xtian gentelmann shou'd repete it as a subject for admerashun. Betwene these heathen men and y^e^ followers of Christ their is all y^e^ differenc betwene a slave and a servent of

a kind Master. Eche bears the same burden; butt y^e^ servent knows he will recieve just wages for his work, wile y^e^ slave hopes for nothing, and so conkludes that to escape work is to be happy!" I could but aknowlege the wisdomm and pyety of this speche; yett whenn I see y^e^ peopel going bye in their black rayment, I envy the young Gemmerel his gloreous deth, and I wish I was laying amongst the slane on the hites of Quebeck. I went to look at y^e^ old house in J. St., but I wou'd not go in to see Mr. F. or y^e^ old roomes; for I think I shou'd see the aparishions of those that once liv'd in them. C. thrivs at Higate, wear the aire is fresh and pewer. I go to see her offen. She is nerely as high as you. Give my servis to Mrs. Rebecka, sinse you say it will plese my father to do so, and he is now dispos'd to think more kindly of me. Butt if he thinks I shal everr arske her to be my wife he is mityly mistaken. You know wear my harte lies—in y^e^ grave with all that made life dere. Thank my father for the Bill, and tell him I pass my time in good companie, and neether drink nor play: and will come

to Ullerton to pay him my respeckts when he pleses to bid me. Butt I hav no desire to leeve London, as I am gladd to be neare C."

Who was C., whom Matthew visited at Highgate, and who was nearly as tall as Ruth Judson? Was she not most likely the same C. mentioned in conjunction with the little M. in the earlier letters? and if so, can there be any doubt that she was the daughter of Matthew Haygarth? Of whom but of a daughter would he write as in this letter? She was at Highgate, at school most likely, and he goes to see her. She is nearly as tall as Mrs. Judson. This height must have been a new thing, or he would scarcely impart it as a piece of news to his sister. And then he has no desire to leave London, as he is glad to be near C.

My life upon it, C. is a daughter.

Acting upon this conviction, I have transcribed all passages relating to C., at whatever distance of time they occur.

Thus, in 1763, I find—"C. has grone very

hansome, and Mrs. N. tells me is much admir'd by a brother of her frend Tabitha. She never stirs abrorde but with Tabitha, and if a dutchess, cou'd be scarce wated on more cairfully. Mrs. N. loves her verry tenderly, and considers her the sweetest and most wel bredd of young women. I hav given her the new edishun of Sir Charls Grandisson, wich they read alowde in y^e^ evenings, turn and turn about, to Mrs. N. at her spinning. C. has given me a wool comforter of her owne worke, and sum stockings wich are two thick to ware, but I hav not told her so."

Again, in 1764: "Tabitha Meynell's brother goes more than ever to Higate. He is a clark in his father's wearhouse; very sober and estimabel, and if it be for y^e^ hapiness of C. to mary him, I wou'd be y^e^ laste of men to sett my orthoritty agenst her enclinashun. She is yett but ayteen yeres of age, wich is young to make a change; so I tell Mrs. N. we will waite. Meanwhile y^e^ young peapel see eche other offen."

Again, in 1765: "Young Meynell is still constant, expressing much love and admirashun for C. in his discorse with Mrs. N., butt sattisfide to wait my plesure before spekeing oppenly to C. He semes a most exempelry young man; his father a cittizen of some repewt in Aldersgait-street, ware I have din'd since last riting to you, and at hoose tabel I was paid much considerashun. He, Tomas Meynell y^e^ father, will give his son five hundred pound, and I prommis a thousand pound with C. and to furnish a house at Chelsee, a verry plesent and countriefide vilage; so I make no doubt there will soon be a wedding.

"I am sorrie to here my father is aleing; give him my love and servise, and will come to Ullerton immediate on receiving his commands. I am plesed to think Mrs. Rebecka Caulfeld is so dutifull and kind to him, and has comfortedd him with prairs and discorses. I thank her for this more than for any frendshipp for my undeserving self. Pray tell her that I am much at her servise.

"Our new king is lov'd and admir'd by all. His ministers not so; and wise peopel do entertain themselfs with what I think foollish jokes a-bout a *Skotch boote*. Perhapps I am not cleverr enuff to see the funn in this joke."

In this letter I detect a certain softening of feeling towards Mrs. Rebecca Caulfield. In the next year — '66 — according to my notes, Matthew's father died, and I have no letters bearing the date of that year, which our Matthew no doubt spent at home. Nor have I any letters from this time until the year of Matthew's marriage with Rebecca Caulfield. In the one year of his union with Mrs. Rebecca, and the last year of his life, there are many letters, a few from London and the rest from the manor-house at Dewsdale. But in these epistles, affectionate and confidential as they are, there is little positive information.

These are the letters of the regenerate and Wesleyanised Matthew; and, like the more elaborate epistles of his wife Rebecca, deal chiefly

with matters spiritual. In these letters I can perceive the workings of a weak mind, which in its decline has become a prey to religious terrors; and though I fully recognise the reforming influence which John Wesley exercised upon the people of England, I fancy poor Matthew would have been better in the hands of a woman whose piety was of a less severe type than that of Wesleyan Rebecca. There is an all-pervading tone of fear in these letters: a depression which is almost despair. In the same breath he laments and regrets the lost happiness of his youth, and regrets and laments his own iniquity in having been so ignorantly and unthinkingly happy.

Thus in one letter he says—

"When I think of that inconsideratt foolish time with M., and how to be nere her semed the highest blisse erth cou'd bistowe or Heven prommis, I trimbel to think of my pore unawaken'd sole, and of her dome on wich the tru light never shown. If I cou'd believe she was happy my owne sorow wou'd be lesse; but I

canot, sence all ye worthyest memberrs of our seck agree that to die thinking onely of erthly frends, and clingeng with a passhunate regrett to them we luv on erth is to be lesse than a tru Xtian, and for sech their is but one dome."

And again, in a still later epistle, he writes—

"On Toosday semnite an awakning discorse fromm a verry young man, until lately a carppenter, but now imploid piusly in going from toun to toun and vilage to vilage, preching. He says, that a life of cairlesse happyness, finding plesure in ye things of this worlde, is—not being repentied of—irretrevable damnation. This is a maloncally thort! I fell to mewsing on M., with hoom I injoy'd such compleat happyness, tel Deth came like a spekter to bannish all comforte. And now I knowe that our lives wear vainity. I ashure you, dear sister, I am prodidjusly sadd when I reffleckt upon this truth—ashuredly it is a harde saying."

Anon comes that strange foreknowledge of death—that instinctive sense of the shadowy hand

so soon to lay him at rest; and with that mystic prescience comes a yearning for the little child M. to be laid where his father may lie down beside him. There are many passages in the latter letters which afford a clue to that mysterious midnight burial at Dewsdale.

"Last nite I drem't of the cherchyarde at S. I satte under the olde yewe tree, as it semed in my dreme, and hurd a childes voice crying in a very piteous mannerr. The thort of this dreme has oppress'd my speritts all day, and Rebecka has enquier'd more than wunce wot ales me. If little M. but lay nere at hande, in y^e^ graive to wich I fele I must soone be carrid, I beleive I shou'd be happyer. Re >roove me for this folley if you plese. I am getting olde, and Sattan temts me with seche fooleish thorts. Wot dose it matter to my sole wear my vile bodie is laid? and yet I have a fonde fooleish desier to be berrid with littel M."

And in these latest letters there is ample evidence of that yearning on Matthew's part to reveal

a secret which Rebecca's own correspondence betrays.

"We tawked of manny things, and she was more than ordinnary kind and gentel. I had a mind to tell her about M., and aske her frendship for C.; but she seemed not to cair to here my sekrets, and I think wou'd be offended if she new the trooth. So I cou'd not finde courrage to tell her. Before I die I shal speek plainely for the saik of C. and M. and y^e^ little one. I shal cum to U. erly nex weak to make my Wille, and this time shal chainge my unour no more. I have burnt y^e^ laste, not likeing it."

This passage occurs in the last letter, amongst the packet confided to me. The letter is dated September 5, 1774. On the fourteenth of the following month Matthew died, and in all probability the will here alluded to was never executed. Certain it is that Matthew, whose end was awfully sudden at the last, died intestate, whereby his son John inherited the bulk, and ultimately the whole, of his fortune. There are many allusions to this infant son in the last few letters; but I do not

think the little creature obtained any great hold on the father's heart. No doubt he was bound and swaddled out of even such small semblance to humanity as one may reasonably expect in a child of six or seven weeks old, and by no means an agreeable being. And poor weak-minded Matthew's heart was with that player-girl wife whom he never acknowledged, and the little M.

And thus ends the story of Matthew Haygarth, so far as I have been able to trace it in the unfathomable gloom of the past.

It seems to me that what I have next to do will be to hunt up information respecting that young man Meynell, whose father lived in Aldersgate-street, and was a respectable and solid citizen of that ilk; able to give a substantial dinner to the father of his son's sweetheart, and altogether a person considerable enough, I should imagine, to have left footprints of some kind or other on the sands of Time. The inscrutable Sheldon will be able to decide in what manner the hunt of the Meynells must begin. I doubt if there is anything more to be done in Ullerton.

I have sent Sheldon a fair copy of my extracts from Matthew's correspondence, and have returned the letters to Miss Judson, carefully packed in accordance with her request. I now await my Sheldon's next communication and the abatement of my influenza before making my next move in the great game of chess called Life.

What is the meaning of Horatio Paget's lengthened abode in this town? He is still here. He went past this house to-day while I was standing at my window in that abject state of mind known only to influenza and despair. I think I was suffering from a touch of both diseases, by the bye. What is that man doing here? The idea of his presence fills me with all manner of vague apprehensions. I cannot rid myself of the absurd notion that the lavender glove I saw lying in Goodge's parlour had been left there by the Captain. I know the idea *is* an absurd one, and I tell myself again and again that Paget *cannot* have any inkling of my business here, and therefore *cannot* attempt to forestall me or steal my hard-

won information. But often as I reiterate this—in that silent argument which a man is always elaborating in his own mind—I am still tormented by a nervous apprehension of treachery from that man. I suppose the boundary line between influenza and idiocy is a very narrow one. And then Horatio Paget is such a thorough-paced scoundrel. He is *lié* with Philip Sheldon too—another thorough-paced scoundrel in a quiet gentlemanly way, unless my instinct deceives me.

October 12th. There is treachery somewhere. Again the Haygarthian epistles have been tampered with. Early this morning comes an indignant note from Miss Judson, reminding me that I promised the packet of letters should be restored to her yesterday at noon, and informing me that they were not returned until last night at eleven o'clock, when they were left at her back garden-gate by a dirty boy who rang the bell as loudly as if he had been giving the alarm of fire, and who thrust the packet rudely into the hand of the servant and vanished immediately. So much

for the messenger. The packet itself, Miss Judson informed me, was of a dirty and disgraceful appearance, unworthy the hands of a gentlewoman, and one of the letters was missing.

Heedless of my influenza, I rushed at once to the lower regions of the inn, saw the waiter into whose hands I had confided my packet at half-past ten o'clock yesterday morning, and asked what messenger had been charged with it. The waiter could not tell me. He did not remember. I told him plainly that I considered this want of memory very extraordinary. The waiter laughed me to scorn, with that quiet insolence which a well-fed waiter feels for a customer who pays twenty shillings a week for his board and lodging. The packet had been given to a very respectable messenger, the waiter made no doubt. As to whether it was the ostler, or one of the boys, or the Boots, or a young woman in the kitchen who went on errands sometimes, the waiter wouldn't take upon himself to swear, being a man who would perish rather than inadvertently perjure himself. As to my packet having been tampered

with, that was ridiculous. What on earth was there in a lump of letter-paper for anyone to steal? Was there money in the parcel? I was fain to confess there was no money; on which the waiter laughed aloud.

Failing the waiter, I applied myself severally to the ostler, the boys, the Boots, and the young woman in the kitchen; and then transpired the curious fact that no one had carried my packet. The ostler was sure he had not; the Boots could take his Bible oath to the same effect; the young woman in the kitchen could not call to mind anything respecting a packet, though she was able to give me a painfully circumstantial account of the events of the morning—where she went and what she did, down to the purchase of three-penny-worth of pearl-ash and a pound of Glenfield starch for the head chambermaid, on which she dwelt with a persistent fondness.

I now felt assured that there had been treachery here, as in the Goodge business; and I asked myself to whom could I impute that treachery?

My instinctive suspicion was of Horatio Paget. And yet, was it not more probable that Theodore Judson senr. and Theodore Judson junr. were involved in this business, and were watching and counterchecking my actions with a view to frustrating the plans of my principal? This was one question which I asked myself as I deliberated upon this mysterious business. Had the Theodore Judsons some knowledge of a secret marriage on the part of Matthew Haygarth? and did they suspect the existence of an heir in the descendant of the issue of that marriage? These were further questions which I asked myself, and which I found it much more easy to ask than to answer.

After having considered these questions, I went to the Lancaster-road, saw Miss Judson—assured her, on my word as a gentleman, that the packet had been delivered by my hands into those of the waiter at eleven o'clock on the previous day, and asked to see the envelope. There it was—my large blue wire-wove office-envelope, addressed in my own writing. But in these days

of adhesive envelopes there is nothing easier than to tamper with the fastening of a letter. I registered a mental vow never again to trust any important document to the protection of a morsel of gummed paper. I counted the letters, convinced myself that there was a deficiency, and then set to work to discover which of the letters had been abstracted. Here I failed utterly. For my own convenience in copying my extracts, I had numbered the letters from which I intended to transcribe passages before beginning my work. My pencilled figures in consecutive order were visible in the corner of the superscription of every document I had used. Those numbered covers I now found intact, and I could thus assure myself that the missing document was one from which I had taken no extract.

This inspired me with a new alarm. Could it be possible that I had overlooked some scrap of information more important than all that I had transcribed?

I racked my brains in the endeavour to recall the contents of that one missing letter; but al-

though I sat in that social tomb, Miss Judson's best parlour, until I felt my blood becoming of an arctic quality, I could remember nothing that seemed worth remembering in the letters I had laid aside as valueless.

I asked Miss Judson if she had any suspicion of the person who had tampered with the packet. She looked at me with an icy smile, and answered in ironical accents, which were even more chilling than the atmosphere of her parlour:

"Do not ask if *I* know who has tampered with those letters, Mr. Hawkehurst. Your affectation of surprise has been remarkably well put on; but I am not to be deceived a second time. When you came to me in the first instance, I had my suspicions; but you came furnished with a note from my brother, and as a Christian I repressed those suspicions. I know now that I have been the dupe of an impostor, and that in intrusting those letters to you I intrusted them to an emissary and tool of THEODORE JUDSON."

I protested that I had never to my knowledge set eyes upon either of the Theodore Judsons; but

the prejudiced kinswoman of those gentlemen shook her head with a smile whose icy blandness was eminently exasperating.

"I am not to be deceived a second time," she said. "Who else but Theodore Judson should have employed you? Who else but Theodore Judson is interested in the Haygarth fortune? O, it was like him to employ a stranger where he knew his own efforts would be unavailing; it was like him to hoodwink me by the agency of a hireling tool."

I had been addressed as a "young man" by the reverend Jonah, and now I was spoken of as a "hireling tool" by Miss Judson. I scarcely knew which was most disagreeable, and I began to think that board and lodging in the present, and a visionary three thousand pounds in the future, would scarcely compensate me for such an amount of ignominy.

I went back to my inn utterly crestfallen—a creature so abject that even the degrading influence of influenza could scarcely sink me any lower in the social scale. I wrote a brief and succinct

account of my proceedings, and despatched the same to George Sheldon, and then I sat down in my sickness and despair, as deeply humiliated as Ajax when he found that he had been pitching into sheep instead of Greeks, as miserable as Job amongst his dust and ashes, but I am happy to say untormented by the chorus of one or the friends of the other. In that respect at least I had some advantage over both.

October 13th. This morning's post brought me a brief scrawl from Sheldon.

"Come back to town directly. I have found the registry of Matthew Haygarth's marriage."

And so I turn my back on Ullerton; with what rejoicing of spirit it is not in language to express.

Book the Sixth.

THE HEIRESS OF THE HAYGARTHS.

CHAPTER I.

DISAPPOINTMENT.

Of all places upon this earth, perhaps, there is none more obnoxious to the civilised mind than London in October; and yet to Valentine Hawkehurst, newly arrived from Ullerton per North-Western Railway, that city seemed as an enchanted and paradisaical region. Were not the western suburbs of that murky metropolis inhabited by Charlotte Halliday, and might he not hope to see her?

He did hope for that enjoyment. He had felt something more than hope while speeding Londonwards by that delightful combination of a liberal railway management, a fast and yet cheap train. He had beguiled himself with a delicious certainty. Early the next morning—or at any rate as early as civilisation permitted—he would hie him to Bayswater, and present himself at the neat iron

gate of Philip Sheldon's gothic villa. *She* would be there, in the garden most likely, his divine Charlotte, so bright and radiant a creature that the dull October morning would be made glorious by her presence—she would be there, and she would welcome him with that smile which made her the most enchanting of women.

Such thoughts as these had engaged him during his homeward journey; and compared with the delight of such visions, the perusal of daily papers and the consumption of sandwiches, whereby other passengers beguiled their transit, seemed a poor amusement. But, arrived in the dingy streets, and walking towards Chelsea under a drizzling rain, the bright picture began to grow dim. Was it not more than likely that Charlotte would be absent from London at this dismal season? Was it not very probable that Philip Sheldon would give him the cold shoulder?

With these gloomy contingencies before him, Mr. Hawkehurst tried to shut Miss Halliday's image altogether out of his mind, and to contemplate the more practical aspect of his affairs.

"I wonder whether that scoundrel Paget has come back to London?" he thought. "What am I to say to him if he has? If I own to having seen him in Ullerton, I shall lay myself open to being questioned by him as to my own business in that locality. Perhaps my wisest plan would be to say nothing, and hear his own account of himself. I fully believe he saw me on the platform that night when we passed each other without speaking."

Horatio Paget was at home when his protégé arrived. He was seated by his fireside in all the domestic respectability of a dressing-gown and slippers, with an evening paper on his knee, a slim smoke-coloured bottle at his elbow, and the mildest of cigars between his lips, when the traveller, weary and weather-stained, entered the lodging-house drawing-room.

Captain Paget received his friend very graciously, only murmuring some faint deprecation of the young man's reeking overcoat, with just such a look of gentlemanly alarm as the lamented

Brummel may have felt when ushered into the presence of a "damp stranger."

"And so you've come back at last," said the Captain, "from Dorking?" He made a little pause here, and looked at his friend with a malicious sparkle in his eyes. "And how was the old aunt? Likely to cut up for any considerable amount, eh? It could only be with a view to that cutting-up process that you could consent to isolate yourself in such a place as Dorking. How did you find things?"

"O, I don't know, I'm sure," Mr. Hawkehurst answered rather impatiently, for his worst suspicions were confirmed by his patron's manner; "I only know I found it tiresome work enough."

"Ah, to be sure! elderly people always are tiresome, especially when they are unacquainted with the world. There is a perennial youth about men and women of the world. The sentimental twaddle people talk of the freshness and purity of a mind unsullied by communion with the world is the shallowest nonsense. Your Madame du Deffand at eighty and your Horace Walpole at sixty are as

lively as a girl and boy. Your octogenarian Voltaire is the most agreeable creature in existence. But take Cymon and Daphne from their flocks and herds and pastoral valleys in their old age, and see what senile bores and quavering imbeciles you would find them. Yes, I have no doubt you found your Dorking aunt a nuisance. Take off your wet overcoat and put it out of the room, and then ring for some hot water. You'll find that cognac very fine. Won't you have a cigar?"

The Captain extended his russia-leather case with the blandest smile. It was a very handsome case. Captain Paget was a man who could descend into some unknown depths of the social ocean in the last stage of shabbiness, and who, while his acquaintance were congratulating themselves upon the fact of his permanent disappearance, would start up suddenly in an unexpected place, provided with every necessity and luxury of civilised life, from a wardrobe by Poole to the last fashionable absurdity in the shape of a cigar-case.

Never had Valentine Hawkehurst found his patron more agreeably disposed than he seemed to

be this evening, and never had he felt more inclined to suspect him.

"And what have you been doing while I have been away?" the young man asked presently. "Any more promoting work?"

"Well, yes, a little bit of provincial business; a life-and-fire on a novel principle; a really good thing, if we can only find men with perception enough to see its merits, and pluck enough to hazard their capital. But promoting in the provinces is very dull work. I've been to two or three towns in the midland districts—Beauport, Mudborough, and Ullerton—and have found the same stagnation everywhere."

Nothing could be more perfect than the semblance of unconscious innocence with which the Captain gave this account of himself: whether he was playing a part, or whether he was telling the entire truth, was a question which even a cleverer man than Valentine Hawkehurst might have found himself unable to answer.

The two men sat till late, smoking and talking; but to-night Valentine found the conversation of

his "guide, philosopher, and friend" strangely distasteful to him. That cynical manner of looking at life, which not long ago had seemed to him the only manner compatible with wisdom and experience, now grated harshly upon those finer senses which had been awakened in the quiet contemplative existence he had of late been leading. He had been wont to enjoy Captain Paget's savage bitterness against a world which had not provided him with a house in Carlton-gardens, and a seat in the Cabinet; but to-night he was revolted by the noble Horatio's tone and manner. Those malicious sneers against respectable people and respectable prejudices, with which the Captain interlarded all his talk, seemed to have a ghastly grimness in their mirth. It was like the talk of some devil who had once been an angel, and had lost all hope of ever being restored to his angelic status.

"To believe in nothing, to respect nothing, to hope for nothing, to fear nothing, to consider life as so many years in which to scheme and lie for the sake of good dinners and well-made coats—

surely there can be no state of misery more complete, no degradation more consummate," thought the young man, as he sat by the fireside smoking and listening dreamily to his companion. "Better to be Mrs. Rebecca Haygarth, narrow-minded and egotistical, but always looking beyond her narrow life to some dimly-comprehended future."

He was glad to escape at last from the Captain's society, and to retire to his own small chamber, where he slept soundly enough after the day's fatigues, and dreamed of the Haygarths and Charlotte Halliday.

He was up early the next morning; but, on descending to the sitting-room, he found his patron toasting his *Times* before a cheerful fire; while his gold hunting-watch stood open on the breakfast-table, and a couple of new-laid eggs made a pleasant wabbling noise in a small saucepan upon the hob.

"You don't care for eggs, I know, Val," said the Captain, as he took the saucepan from the hob.

He had heard the young man object to an egg of French extraction too long severed from its

native land; but he knew very well that for rural delicacies from a reliable dairyman, at twopence apiece, Mr. Hawkehurst had no particular antipathy. Even in so small a matter as a new-laid egg the Captain knew how to protect his own interest.

"There's some of that Italian sausage you're so fond of, dear boy," he said politely, pointing to a heel of some grayish horny-looking compound. "Thanks; I'll pour out the coffee; there's a knack in these things; half the clearness of coffee depends on the way in which it's poured out, you see."

And with this assurance Captain Paget filled his own large breakfast-cup with a careful hand and a tender solemnity of countenance. If he was a trifle less considerate in the pouring out of the second cup, and if some "grounds" mingled with the second portion, Valentine Hawkehurst was unconscious of the fact.

"Do try that Italian sausage," said the Captain, as he discussed his second egg, after peeling the most attractive crusts from the French rolls, and pushing the crumb to his protégé.

"No, thank you; it looks rather like what your shop-people call an old housekeeper; besides there's a little too much garlic in those compositions for my taste."

"Your taste has grown fastidious," said the Captain; "one would think you were going to call upon some ladies this morning."

"There are not many ladies on my visiting-list. O, by the way, how's Diana? Have you seen her lately?"

"No," answered the Captain promptly. "I only returned from my provincial tour a day or two ago, and have had no time to waste dancing attendance upon her. She's well enough, I've no doubt; and she's uncommonly well off in Sheldon's house, and ought to think herself so."

Having skimmed his newspaper, Captain Paget rose and invested himself in his overcoat. He put on his hat before the glass over the mantelpiece, adjusting the brim above his brows with the thoughtful care that distinguished his performance of all those small duties which he owed to himself.

"And what may *you* be going to do with yourself to-day, Val?" he asked of the young man, who sat nursing his own knee and staring absently at the fire.

"Well, I don't quite know," Mr. Hawkehurst answered hypocritically; "I think I may go as far as Gray's Inn, and look in upon George Sheldon."

"You'll dine out of doors, I suppose?"

This was a polite way of telling Mr. Hawkehurst that there would be no dinner for him at home.

"I suppose I shall. You know I'm not punctilious on the subject of dinner. Anything you please—from a banquet at the London Tavern to a ham-sandwich and a glass of ale at fourpence."

"Ah, to be sure; youth is reckless of its gastric juices. I shall find you at home when I come in to-night, I daresay. I think I may dine in the city. *Au plaisir.*"

"I don't know about the pleasure," muttered Mr. Hawkehurst. "You're a very delightful person, my friend Horatio; but there comes a

crisis in a man's existence when he begins to feel that he has had enough of you. Poor Diana! what a father!"

He did not waste much time on further consideration of his patron, but set off at once on his way to Gray's Inn. It was too early to call at the Lawn, or he would fain have gone there before seeking George Sheldon's dingy offices. Nor could he very well present himself at the gothic villa without some excuse for so doing. He went to Gray's Inn therefore; but on his way thither called at a tavern near the Strand, which was the head-quarters of a literary association known as the Ragamuffins. Here he was fortunate enough to meet with an acquaintance in the person of a Ragamuffin in the dramatic-author line, who was reading the morning's criticisms on a rival's piece produced the night before, with a keen enjoyment of every condemnatory sentence. From this gentleman Mr. Hawkehurst obtained a box-ticket for a West-end theatre; and, armed with this mystic document, he felt himself able to present a bold countenance at Mr. Sheldon's door.

"Will she be glad to see me again?" he asked himself. "Pshaw! I daresay she has forgotten me by this time. A fortnight is an age with some women; and I should fancy Charlotte Halliday just one of those bright impressionable beings who forget easily. I wonder whether she is *really* like that 'Molly' whose miniature was found by Mrs. Haygarth in the tulip-leaf escritoire; or was the resemblance between those two faces only a silly fancy of mine?"

Mr. Hawkehurst walked the whole distance from Chelsea to Gray's Inn; and it was midday when he presented himself before George Sheldon, whom he found seated at his desk with the elephantine pedigree of the Haygarths open before him, and profoundly absorbed in the contents of a note-book. He looked up from this note-book as Valentine entered, but did not leave off chewing the end of his pencil as he mumbled a welcome to the returning wanderer. It has been seen that neither of the Sheldon brothers were demonstrative men.

After that unceremonious greeting, the lawyer

continued his perusal of the note-book for some minutes, while Valentine seated himself in a clumsy leather-covered arm-chair by the fireplace.

"Well, young gentleman," Mr. Sheldon exclaimed, as he closed his book with a triumphant snap, "I think *you're* in for a good thing; and you may thank your lucky stars for having thrown you into my path."

"My stars are not remarkable for their luckiness in a general way," answered Mr. Hawkehurst coolly, for the man had not yet been born from whom he would accept patronage. "I suppose if I'm in for a good thing, you're in for a better thing, my dear George; so you needn't come the benefactor quite so strong for my edification. How did you ferret out the certificate of gray-eyed Molly's espousals?"

George Sheldon contemplated his coadjutor with an admiring stare.

"It has been my privilege to enjoy the society of cool hands, Mr. Hawkehurst; and certainly you are about the coollest of the lot—bar one, as they say in the ring. But that is *ni ci ni là*. I

have found the certificate of Matthew Haygarth's marriage, and to my mind the Haygarth succession is as good as ours."

"Ah, those birds in the bush have such splendid plumage! but I'd rather have the modest sparrow in my hand. However, I'm very glad our affairs are marching. How did you discover the marriage-lines?"

"Not without hard labour, I can tell you. Of course my idea of a secret marriage was at the best only a plausible hypothesis; and I hardly dared to hug myself with the hope that it might turn up trumps. My idea was based upon two or three facts, namely, the character of the young man, his long residence in London away from the ken of respectable relatives and friends, and the extraordinary state of the marriage-laws at the period in which our man lived."

"Ah, to be sure! That was a strong point."

"I should rather think it was. I took the trouble to look up the history of Mayfair marriages and Fleet marriages before you started for Ullerton, and I examined all the evidence I

could get on that subject. I made myself familiar with the Rev. Alexander Keith of Mayfair, who helped to bring clandestine marriages into vogue amongst the swells, and with Dr. Gaynham—agreeably nicknamed Bishop of Hell—and more of the same calibre; and the result of my investigations convinced me that in those days a hare-brained young reprobate must have found it rather more difficult to avoid matrimony than to achieve it. He might be married when he was tipsy; he might be married when he was comatose from the effects of a stand-up fight with Mohawks; his name might be assumed by some sportive Benedict of his acquaintance given to practical joking, and he might find himself saddled with a wife he never saw; or if, on the other hand, of an artful and deceptive turn, he might procure a certificate of a marriage that had never taken place,—for there were very few friendly offices which the Fleet parsons refused to perform for their clients—for a consideration."

"But how about the legality of the Fleet marriage?"

"There's the rub. Before the New Marriage Act passed in 1753 a Fleet marriage was indissoluble. It was an illegal act, and the parties were punishable; but the Gordian knot was quite as secure as if it had been tied in the most orthodox manner. The great difficulty to my mind was the *onus probandi*. The marriage might have taken place; the marriage might be to all intents and purposes a good marriage; but how produce undeniable proof of such a ceremony, when all ceremonies of the kind were performed with a manifest recklessness and disregard of law? Even if I found an apparently good certificate, how was I to prove that it was not one of those lying certificates of marriages that had never taken place? Again, what kind of registers could posterity expect from these parson-adventurers, very few of whom could spell, and most of whom lived in a chronic state of drunkenness? They married people sometimes by their Christian names alone—very often under assumed names. What consideration had they for heirs-at-law in the future, when under the

soothing influence of a gin-bottle in the present? I thought of all these circumstances, and I was half-inclined to despair of realising my idea of an early marriage. I took it for granted that such a secret business would be more likely to have taken place in the precincts of the Fleet than anywhere else; and having no particular clue, I set to work, in the first place, to examine all available documents relating to such marriages."

"It must have been slow work."

"It *was* slow work," answered Mr. Sheldon with a suppressed groan, that was evoked by the memory of a bygone martyrdom. "I needn't enter into all the details of the business,—the people I had to apply to for permission to see this set of papers, and the signing and countersigning I had to go through before I could see that set of papers, and the extent of circumlocution and idiocy I had to encounter in a general way before I could complete my investigation. The result was *nil;* and after working like a galley-slave I found myself no better off than

before I began my search. Your extracts from Matthew's letters put me on a new track. I concluded therefrom that there had been a marriage, and that the said marriage had been a deliberate act on the part of the young man. I therefore set to work to do what I ought to have done at starting—I hunted in all the parish registers to be found within a certain radius of such and such localities. I began with Clerkenwell, in which neighbourhood our friend spent such happy years, according to that pragmatical epistle of Mrs. Rebecca's; but after hunting in all the mouldy old churches within a mile of St. John's-gate, I was no nearer arriving at any record of Matthew Haygarth's existence. So I turned my back upon Clerkenwell, and went southward to the neighbourhood of the Marshalsea, where Mistress Molly's father was at one time immured, and whence I thought it very probable Mistress Molly had started on her career as a matron. This time my guess was a lucky one. After hunting the registers of St. Olave's, St. Saviour's, and St. George's, and after the expenditure of more

shillings in donations to sextons than I care to remember, I at last lighted on a document which I consider worth three thousand pounds to you—and—a very decent sum of money to me."

"I wonder what colour our hair will be when we touch that money?" said Valentine meditatively. "These sort of cases generally find their way into Chancery-lane, don't they?—that lane which, for some unhappy travellers, has no turning except the one dismal *via* which leads to dusty death. You seem in very good spirits; and I suppose I ought to be elated too. Three thousand pounds would give me a start in life, and enable me to set up in the new character of a respectable rate-paying citizen. But I've a kind of presentiment that this hand of mine will never touch the prize of the victor; or, in plainer English, that no good will ever arise to me or mine out of the reverend intestate's hundred thousand pounds."

"Why, what a dismal-minded croaker you are this morning!" exclaimed George Sheldon with unmitigated disgust; "a regular raven, by Jove!

You come to a fellow's office just as matters are beginning to look like success—after ten years' plodding and ten years' disappointment—and you treat him to maudlin howls about the Court of Chancery. This is a new line you've struck out, Hawkehurst, and I can tell you it isn't a pleasant one."

"Well, no, I suppose I oughtn't to say that sort of thing," answered Valentine in an apologetic tone; "but there are some days in a man's life when there seems to be a black cloud between him and everything he looks at. I feel like that to-day. There's a tightening sensation about something under my waistcoat—my heart, perhaps—a sense of depression that may be either physical or mental, that I can't get rid of. If a man had walked by my side from Chelsea to Holborn whispering forebodings of evil into my ear at every step, I couldn't have felt more downhearted than I do."

"What did you eat for breakfast?" asked Mr. Sheldon impatiently. "A tough beefsteak fried by a lodging-house cook, I daresay—they

will fry their steaks. Don't inflict the consequences of your indigestible diet upon me. To tell me that there's a black cloud between you and everything you look at, is only a sentimental way of telling me that you're bilious. Pray be practical, and let us look at things from a business point of view. Here is Appendix A.—a copy of the registry of the marriage of Matthew Haygarth, bachelor, of Clerkenwell, in the county of Middlesex, to Mary Murchison, spinster, of Southwark, in the county of Surrey. And here is Appendix B.—a copy of the registry of the marriage between William Meynell, bachelor, of Smithfield, in the county of Middlesex, to Caroline Mary Haygarth, spinster, of Highgate, in the same county."

"You have found the entry of a second Haygarthian marriage?"

"I have. The C. of Matthew's letters is the Caroline Mary here indicated, the daughter and heiress of Matthew Haygarth—doubtless christened Caroline after her gracious majesty the consort of George II., and Mary after the Molly whose picture was found in the tulip-leaf bureau.

The Meynell certificate was easy enough to find, since the letters told me that Miss C.'s suitor had a father who lived in Aldersgate-street, and a father who approved his son's choice. The Aldersgate citizen had a house of his own, and a more secure social status altogether than that poor, weak, surreptitious Matthew. It was therefore only natural that the marriage should be celebrated in the Meynell mansion. Having considered this, I had only to ransack the registers of a certain number of churches round and about Aldersgate-street in order to find what I wanted; and after about a day and a half of hard labour I did find the invaluable document which places me one generation nearer the present, and on the high-road to the discovery of my heir-at-law. I searched the same registry for children of the aforesaid William and Caroline Mary Meynell, but could find no record of such children nor any further entry of the name of Meynell. But we must search other registries within access of Aldersgate-street before we give up the idea of finding such entries in that neighbourhood."

"And what is to be the next move?"

"The hunting-up of all descendants of this William and Caroline Mary Meynell, wheresoever such descendants are to be found. We are now altogether off the Haygarth and Judson scent, and have to beat a new covert."

"Good!" exclaimed Valentine more cheerfully. "How is the new covert to be beaten?"

"We must start from Aldersgate-street. Meynell of Aldersgate-street must have been a responsible man, and it will be hard if there is no record of him extant in all the old topographical histories of wards, without and within, which cumber the shelves of your dryasdust libraries. We must hunt up all available books; and when we've got all the information that books can give us, we can go in upon hearsay evidence, which is always the most valuable in these cases."

"That means another encounter with ancient mariners—I beg your pardon—oldest inhabitants," said Valentine with a despondent yawn. "Well, I suppose that sort of individual is a little less obtuse when he lives within the roar of the

great city's thunder than when he vegetates in the dismal outskirts of a manufacturing town. Where am I to find my octogenarian prosers? and when am I to begin my operations upon them?"

"The sooner you begin the better," replied Mr. Sheldon. "I've taken all preliminary steps for you already, and you'll find the business tolerably smooth sailing. I've made a list of certain people who may be worth seeing."

Mr. Sheldon selected a paper from the numerous documents upon the table.

"Here they are," he said: "John Grewter, wholesale stationer, Aldersgate-street; Anthony Sparsfield, carver and gilder, in Barbican. These are, so far as I can ascertain, the two oldest men now trading in Aldersgate-street; and from these men you ought to be able to find out something about old Meynell. I don't anticipate any difficulty about the Meynells, except the possibility that we may find more of them than we want, and have some trouble in shaking them into their places."

"I'll tackle my friend the stationer to-morrow morning," said Valentine.

"You'd better drop in upon him in the afternoon, when the day's business may be pretty well over," returned the prudent Sheldon. "And now all you've got to do, Hawkehurst, is to work with a will, and work on patiently. If you do as well in London as you did at Ullerton, neither you nor I will have any cause to complain. Of course I needn't impress upon you the importance of secrecy."

"No," replied Valentine; "I'm quite alive to that."

He then proceeded to inform George Sheldon of that encounter with Captain Paget on the platform at Ullerton, and of the suspicion that had been awakened in his mind by the sight of the glove in Goodge's parlour.

The lawyer shook his head.

"That idea about the glove was rather far-fetched," he said thoughtfully; "but I don't like the look of that meeting at the station. My brother Philip is capable of anything in the way of manœuvring; and I'm not ashamed to confess that I'm no match for him. He was in here one day when

I had the Haygarth pedigree spread out on the table, and I know he smelt a rat. We must beware of him, Hawkehurst, and we must work against time if we don't want him to anticipate us."

"I sha'n't let the grass grow under my feet," replied Valentine. "I was really interested in that Haygarthian history: there was a dash of romance about it, you see. I don't feel the same gusto in the Meynell chase, but I daresay I shall begin to get up an interest in it as my investigation proceeds. Shall I call the day after to-morrow and tell you my adventures?"

"I think you'd better stick to the old plan, and let me have the result of your work in the form of a diary," answered Sheldon. And with this the two men parted.

It was now half-past two o'clock: it would be half-past three before Valentine could present himself at the Lawn—a very seasonable hour at which to call upon Mrs. Sheldon with his offering of a box for the new play.

An omnibus conveyed him to Bayswater at a snail's pace, and with more stoppages than ever

mortal omnibus was subjected to before, as it seemed to that one eager passenger. At last the leafless trees of the Park appeared between the hats and bonnets of Valentine's opposite neighbours. Even those brown leafless trees reminded him of Charlotte. Beneath such umbrage had he parted from her. And now he was going to see the bright young face once more. He had been away from town about a fortnight; but, taken in relation with Miss Halliday, that fortnight seemed half a century.

Chrysanthemums and china-asters beautified Mr. Sheldon's neat little garden, and the plate-glass windows of his house shone with all their wonted radiance. It was like the houses one sees framed and glazed in an auctioneer's office—the greenest imaginable grass, the bluest windows, the reddest bricks, the whitest stone. "It is a house that would set my teeth on edge, but for the one sweet creature who lives in it," Valentine thought to himself as he waited at the florid iron gate, which was painted a vivid ultramarine and picked out with gold.

He tried in vain to catch a glimpse of some feminine figure in the small suburban garden. No fluttering scarlet petticoat or coquettish feather revealed the presence of the divinity.

The prim maid-servant informed him that Mrs. Sheldon was at home, and asked if he would please to walk into the drawing-room.

Would he please? Would he not have been pleased to walk into a raging furnace if there had been a chance of meeting Charlotte Halliday amid the flames? He followed the maid-servant into Mrs. Sheldon's irreproachable apartment, where the show books upon the show table were ranged at the usual mathematically correct distances from one another, and where the speckless looking-glasses and all-pervading French polish imparted a chilly aspect to the chamber. A newly-lighted fire was smouldering in the shining steel grate, and a solitary female figure was seated by the broad Tudor window bending over some needle-work.

It was the figure of Diana Paget, and she was quite alone in the room. Valentine's heart sank

a little as he saw the solitary figure, and perceived that it was not the woman he loved.

Diana looked up from her work and recognised the visitor. Her face flushed, but the flush faded very quickly, and Valentine was not conscious of that flattering indication.

"How do you do, Diana?" he said. "Here I am again, you see, like the proverbial bad shilling. I have brought Mrs. Sheldon an order for the Princess's."

"You're very kind; but I don't think she'll care to go. She was complaining of a headache this afternoon."

"O, she'll forget all about her headache if she wants to go to the play. She's the sort of little woman who is always ready for a theatre or a concert. Besides, Miss Halliday may like to go, and will easily persuade her mamma.—Whom could she not persuade?" added Mr. Hawkehurst within himself.

"Miss Halliday is out of town," Diana replied coldly.

The young man felt as if his heart were sud-

denly transformed into so much lead, so heavy did it seem to grow. What a foolish thing it seemed that he should be the victim of this fair enslaver! —he, who until lately had fancied himself incapable of any earnest feeling or deep emotion.

"Out of town!" he repeated with unconcealed disappointment.

"Yes; she has gone on a visit to some relations in Yorkshire. She actually has relations; doesn't that sound strange to you and me?"

Valentine did not notice this rather cynical remark.

"She'll be away ever so long, I suppose?" he said.

"I have no idea how long she may stay there. The people idolise her, I understand. You know it is her privilege to be idolised; and of course they will persuade her to stay as long as they can. You seem disappointed at not seeing her."

"I am very much disappointed," Valentine answered frankly; "she is a sweet girl."

There was a silence after this. Miss Paget resumed her work with skilful rapid fingers. She

was picking up shining little beads one by one on the point of her needle, and transferring them to the canvas stretched upon an embroidery frame before her. It was a kind of work exacting extreme care and precision, and the girl's hand never faltered, though a tempest of passionate feeling agitated her as she worked.

"I am very sorry not to see her," Valentine said presently, "for the sight of her is very dear to me. Why should I try to hide my feelings from you, Diana? We have endured so much misery together that there must be some bond of union between us. To me you have always seemed like a sister, and I have no wish to keep any secret from you, though you receive me so coldly that one would think I had offended you."

"You have not offended me. I thank you for being so frank with me. You would have gained little by an opposite course. I have long known your affection for Charlotte."

"You guessed my secret?"

"I saw what anyone could have seen who had

taken the trouble to watch you for ten minutes during your visits to this house."

"Was my unhappy state so very conspicuous?" exclaimed Valentine, laughing. "Was I so obviously spoony? *I* who have so ridiculed anything in the way of sentiment? You make me blush for my folly, Diana. What is that you are dotting with all those beads?—something very elaborate."

"It is a prie-dieu chair I am working for Mrs. Sheldon. Of course I am bound to do something for my living."

"And so you wear out your eyesight in the working of chairs! Poor girl! it seems hard that your beauty and accomplishments don't find a better market than that. I daresay you will marry some millionnaire friend of Mr. Sheldon's one of these days, and I shall hear of your house in Park-lane and three-hundred guinea barouche."

"You are very kind to promise me a millionnaire. The circumstances of my existence hitherto have been so peculiarly fortunate that I am

justified in expecting such a suitor. My millionnaire shall ask you to dinner at my house in Park-lane; and you shall play *écarté* with him, if you like—papa's kind of *écarté*."

"Don't talk of those things, Di," said Mr. Hawkehurst, with something that was almost a shudder; "let us forget that we ever led that kind of life."

"Yes," replied Diana, "let us forget it—if we can."

The bitterness of her tone struck him painfully. He sat for some minutes watching her silently, and pitying her fate. What a sad fate it seemed, and how hopeless! For him there was always some chance of redemption. He could go out into the world, and cut his way through the forest of difficulty with the axe of the conqueror. But what could a woman do who found herself in the midst of that dismal forest? She could only sit at the door of her lonesome hut, looking out with weary eyes for the prince who was to come and rescue her. And Valentine remembered how many women there are to whom the prince never

comes, and who must needs die and be buried beneath that gloomy umbrage.

"O, let us have women doctors, women lawyers, women parsons, women stonebreakers—anything rather than these dependent creatures who sit in other people's houses, working prie-dieu chairs, and pining for freedom," he thought to himself, as he watched the pale stern face in the chill afternoon light.

"Do leave off working for a few minutes, and talk to me, Di," he said rather impatiently. "You don't know how painful it is to a man to see a woman absorbed in some piece of needlework at the very moment when he wants all her sympathy. I am afraid you are not quite happy. Do confide in me, dear, as frankly as I confide in you. Are these people kind to you? Charlotte is, of course. But the elder birds, Mr. and Mrs. Sheldon, are they kind?"

"They are very kind. Mr. Sheldon is not a demonstrative man, as you know; but I am not accustomed to have people in a rapturous state of mind about me and my affairs. He is kinder to

me than my father ever was; and I don't see how I can expect more than that. Mrs. Sheldon is extremely kind, in her way—which is rather a feeble way, as you know."

"And Charlotte—?"

"You answered for Charlotte yourself just now. Yes, she is very, very, very good to me; much better than I deserve. I was almost going to quote the collect, and say 'desire or deserve.'"

"Why should you not desire or deserve her goodness?" asked Valentine.

"Because I am not a lovable kind of person. I am not sympathetic. I know that Charlotte is very fascinating, very charming; but sometimes her very fascination repels me. I think the atmosphere of that horrible swampy district between Lambeth and Battersea, where my childhood was spent, must have soured my disposition."

"No, Diana; you have only learnt a bitter way of talking. I know your heart is noble and true. I have seen your suppressed indignation many a time when your father's meannesses have revolted you. Our lives have been very hard,

dear; but let us hope for brighter days. I think they must come to us."

"They will never come to me," said Diana.

"You say that with an air of conviction. But why should they not come to you—brighter and better days?"

"I cannot tell you that. I can only tell you that they will not come. And do you hope that any good will ever come of your love for Charlotte Halliday; you, who know Mr. Sheldon?"

"I am ready to hope anything."

"You think that Mr. Sheldon would let his stepdaughter marry a penniless man?"

"I may not always be penniless. Besides, Mr. Sheldon has no actual authority over Charlotte."

"But he has moral influence over her. She is very easily influenced."

"I am ready to hope even in spite of Mr. Sheldon's opposing influence. You must not try to crush this one little floweret that has grown up in a barren waste, Diana. It is my prison-flower."

Mrs. Sheldon came into the room as he said

this. She was very cordial, very eloquent upon the subject of her headache, and very much inclined to go to the theatre, notwithstanding that ailment, when she heard that Mr. Hawkehurst had been kind enough to bring her a box.

"Diana and I could go," she said, "if we can manage to be in time after our six-o'clock dinner. Mr. Sheldon does not care about theatres. All the pieces tire him. He declares they are all stupid. But then, you see, if one's mind is continually wandering, the cleverest piece must seem stupid," Mrs. Sheldon added thoughtfully; "and my husband is so very absent-minded."

After some further discussion about the theatre, Valentine bade the ladies good afternoon.

"Won't you stop to see Mr. Sheldon?" asked Georgina; "he is in the library with Captain Paget.—You did not know that your papa was here, did you, Diana, my dear? He came in with Mr. Sheldon an hour ago."

"I won't disturb Mr. Sheldon," said Valentine. "I will call again in a few days."

He took leave of the two ladies, and went out

into the hall. As he emerged from the drawing-room the door of the library was opened, and he heard Philip Sheldon's voice within, saying,

"—your accuracy with regard to the name of Meynell."

It was the close of a sentence; but the name struck immediately upon Valentine's ear. Meynell—the name which had for him so peculiar an interest.

"Is it only a coincidence," he thought to himself, "or is Horatio Paget on our track?"

And then he argued with himself that his ears might have deceived him, and that the name he had heard might not have been Meynell, but only a name of somewhat similar sound.

It was Captain Paget who had opened the door. He came out into the passage and recognised his protégé. They left the house together; and the Captain was especially gracious.

"We will dine together, Val," he said; but, to his surprise, Mr. Hawkehurst declined the proffered entertainment.

"I'm tired out with a hard day's work," he

said, "and should be very bad company; so, if you'll excuse me, I'll go back to Omega-street and get a chop."

The Captain stared at him in amazement. He could not comprehend the man who could refuse to dine luxuriously at the expense of his fellow man.

Valentine had of late acquired new prejudices. He no longer cared to enjoy the hospitality of Horatio Paget. In Omega-street the household expenses were shared by the two men. It was a kind of club upon a small scale; and there was no degradation in breaking bread with the elegant Horatio.

To Omega-street Valentine returned this afternoon, there to eat a frugal meal and spend a meditative evening, uncheered by one glimmer of that radiance which more fortunate men know as the light of home.

END OF VOL. II.

ROBSON AND SON, GRE
PANCE